

Albrecht Classen
The Power of a Woman's Voice
in Medieval and Early Modern Literatures

Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture

Edited by
Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge

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Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York

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The Power of a Woman's Voice
in Medieval and
Early Modern Literatures

New Approaches
to German and European Women Writers
and to Violence Against Women
in Premodern Times



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Introduction¹

To disentangle the highly complex web of tropes and topoi concerning the power relationship between men and women—here mostly understood in regards to cultural, intellectual, literary, and theological terms—from antiquity until today would require a whole library. We might as well say that most literary texts in which male and female characters interact with each other reflect a continuous negotiation process which has required constant adjustments and corrections in the audience's and the protagonists' perceptions, attitudes, and approaches ever since poets have addressed issues pertaining to love, marriage, and conflicts between the genders. In the Middle Ages this was the case beginning with the eleventh century, whereas before almost all texts were written by men for a male audience and primarily dealt with male issues, apart from theological topics, disregarding some, certainly remarkable, exceptions, such as Dhruoda, Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, and Herrad of Hohenburg.² The emergence of courtly literature in twelfth-century Provence and elsewhere also represents the discovery of gender difference as constitutive for the social fabric of the class of aristocrats.³

Not surprisingly, there is a great risk still today of becoming prey to the fallacies of gender stereotypes concerning the Middle Ages and other historical periods, since those who voice a certain opinion about genders tend to react to specific situations or isolated cases.⁴ The more some authors formulate claims about some

¹ I would like to thank Marilyn Sandidge, Westfield State College, MA, for her critical reading of this introductory chapter. Constant Mews, Monash University, Australia, also provided me with valuable feedback. Frau Manuela Gerlof from Walter de Gruyter was a wonderful copy-editor and was kind enough to lend me, so to speak, her diligent eyes.

² Prudence Allen, R.S.M., *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750 BC–AD 1250* (1985; Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1997); Lisa M. Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe: 400–1100*. Cambridge Medieval Textbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³ See C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), discusses this phenomenon in great detail and underscores, above all, that the theme of love, as dealt with by early-medieval writers, primarily concerned ethical and philosophical issues, and not the heterosexual erotic.

⁴ Louise O. Vasvári, "'Buon cavallo e mal cavallo vuole sprone, e buona femina e mala femina vuol bastone': Medieval Cultural Fictions of Wife Battering," *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early-Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 278 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004),

conditions or groups of people in the past, the more these opinions are quickly and firmly entrenched, hence ossified and often amazingly inaccurate, when they meet concrete expectations of today. Cristina Segura, for instance, in 1984 characterized the conditions of medieval society in the following way: "it is a society of knights in which women live under totally inferior conditions and are subjugated; [today] nobody perceives any need to write the history of women, just as nobody cares about the destiny of the peasants."⁵ Nothing could be further from the truth, at least as far as we can say by now, more than twenty years later, especially if we consider the enormous progress achieved by medieval feminists and other scholars who investigate gender issues and the social-historical, economic, religious, and literary conditions women lived under.⁶ Charles J. Reid, Jr., in a thorough analysis of twelfth-century canon and Church laws, demonstrates that many commentators offered complex and varying views regarding women's rights, husbands' privilege as *paterfamilias*, and mutual obligations within marriage. Certainly, as Reid affirms, by the high Middle Ages women's legal position had become the hot issue of highly controversial legal discourse and was no longer pre-determined by patriarchal society.⁷ Barbara Newman has warned us, for instance, about re-inscribing gender stereotypes into medieval texts because of a hypertrophic modern feminist agenda: "Through an excess of empathy, an

313–36. Her arguments are certainly convincing, considering the specific selection of her evidence. But in the chapter on domestic violence I will demonstrate where the problem with her approach rests.

⁵ Cristina Segura, *Las mujeres en el medievo hispano*. Cuadernos de Investigación medieval. Guía crítica de temas históricos, 1/2 (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 1984), 10: "Esta es una sociedad de 'caballeros', en la cual las mujeres están en condiciones de total inferioridad y sometimiento; por ello nadie se plantea la necesidad de hacer la historia de las mujeres, como tampoco se preocupan por la suerte de los campesinos."

⁶ Here is not the space to examine the current trends of medieval scholarship on women at large, but it is worth noting that also Spanish scholars, who are often, though unjustifiably so, ignored by Anglo-American feminist researchers, have reached considerably new perspectives regarding women's roles and voices in the medieval world, see, for example, Josep-Ignasi Saranyana, *La discusión medieval sobre la condición femenina (Siglos VIII al XIII)*. Bibliotheca Salmanticensis, Estudios, 190 (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia, 1997), who examines the profound tensions between theoretical, theological perspectives regarding women and secular attitudes. Often, as Saranyana observes, theologians felt obligated to accept men's and women's equality as God's creatures, but they quickly tended to differentiate again between man as the created being (Adam) and woman as formed being (Eve), as in the theology by Peter Lombard, 68–75. See also *Las mujeres en el cristianismo medieval: Imágenes teorías y cauces de actuación religiosa* Angela Muñoz Fernández (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 1989); for a focused study on medieval German women's literature, see Eva Parra Membrives, *Mundos femeninos emancipados: Reconstrucción teórico-empírica de una propuesta literaria femenina en la Edad Media alemana*. Textos de Filología, 5 (Zaragoza: Anubar, 1998).

⁷ Charles J. Reid, Jr., *Power over the Body, Equality in the Family: Rights and Domestic Relations in Medieval Canon Law* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004). For a review, see Evyatar Marienberg in: *The Medieval Review* (online) 06.09.20.

exaggerated notion of the solidarity of women, we may deny the otherness and diversity of the past; or through an excess of suspicion, an inflated and monolithic view of patriarchy, we may deny our fore Sisters such freedom and self-determination as they possessed The assumption that male-authored texts always re-inscribe these [patriarchal] hierarchies, while female-authored texts subvert them, is itself a regrettable instance of gender stereotyping.”⁸

Nevertheless, a fundamental problem continues to vex historians and literary historians even in the twenty-first century, namely that those who wield the power of the pen also determine our perspective toward the past. Accordingly, most literary histories emphasize those texts written by men but touch upon those composed by women—often utilizing less-fictional genres⁹—only in passing. A major exception to this rule is Peter Dronke’s seminal *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (1984) in which he demonstrates that numerous women indeed enjoyed access to advanced learning and successfully participated in the world of literature, even if they mostly limited their topics to religious and didactic issues.¹⁰ Many scholars have followed Dronke’s lead, either by focusing on mystical writers, such as Mechthild von Magdeburg,¹¹ or on epistolary authors.¹² Noteworthy authors of fifteenth-century German chapbooks, such as Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken, are increasingly attracting attention, but true enthusiasm or conviction still seems to be lacking.¹³

⁸ Barbara Newman, “On the Ethics of Feminist Historiography,” *Exemplaria* 2, 2 (1990): 702–06; here 705.

⁹ Rosamond McKitterick, “Frauen und Schriftlichkeit im frühen Mittelalter,” *Weibliche Lebensgestaltung im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Hans Werner Goetz (Cologne: Böhlau, 1991), 65–118. For an early, but comprehensive, and truly seminal study, see Peter Dronke, *Women Writers in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). One of the earliest studies, though often overlooked by non-German scholarship, was published by Herbert Grundmann, “Die Frauen und die Literatur im Mittelalter,” *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 26 (1936): 129–61. Consult also the remarkable, unfortunately mostly forgotten doctoral dissertation by Lotte Traeger, “Das Frauenschrifttum in Deutschland von 1500–1600,” Ph.D. thesis, Prague 1943. Now see Anne Lingard Klinck and Ann Marie Rasmussen, eds., *Medieval Woman’s Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: a Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (d. 203) to Marguerite Perote (d. 1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); see also Prudence Allen, R.S.M., *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C. — A.D. 1250* (1985; Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997).

¹¹ Sara S. Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

¹² Albrecht Classen, “Female Explorations of Literacy: Epistolary Challenges to the Literary Canon in the Late Middle Ages,” *Disputatio. An International Transdisciplinary Journal of the Late Middle Ages*. Vol. 1: *The Late Medieval Epistle*, ed. Carol Poster and Richard Utz (Evanston, ILL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 89–121.

¹³ Ute von Bloh, *Ausgerenkte Ordnung. Vier Prosapen aus dem Umkreis der Gräfin Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken: ‘Herzog Herpin’, ‘Loher und Maller’, ‘Huge Scheppel’, Königin Sibille’*. Münchener Texte und

Contrary to general assumptions about the exceptional nature of these individual female figures who had to struggle hard to carve a small niche for themselves within a patriarchal world, the ten chapters presented here will demonstrate two critical points: 1. these outstanding women writers could only raise their voice because of a much wider range of female authors behind them who were active throughout the entire Middle Ages; 2. it is no longer adequate to search for hitherto ignored or lost female poets; instead the task at hand is to reveal the discursive nature of the gender relationship. In this sense it will also be an important step in our investigation to examine how men responded to various gender issues, whether we are talking about marriage, sexuality, or violence.¹⁴ This would necessitate to incorporate recent findings about medieval masculinity, that is, men's fear of women, their sense of inferiority in face of allegedly nymphomaniac women, and the problematic cohabitation of men and women either in marriage, in larger families, and in social units (city population, farms, and the court).¹⁵ In the present book I will also rely on Dronke's overall findings and use them as a springboard for further investigations, taking into regard mostly German women writers from the late Middle Ages, probing again and again what individual poets and authors had to say about their own reality and opportunities, how they managed to develop their own position as writers, and how they perceived women's positions within society at large, whether as victims or as subjects. Despite the emphasis on German literary texts, however, I will also incorporate evidence from English, French, Italian, and Latin writers in support of the overall arguments because medieval literature has always to be seen in its European context.

It is no longer good enough to recognize individual women writers within the broad canon of medieval literature as isolated, often subjugated cases, that is, to shed light on marginalized voices. Instead, we need to consider the various gender relationships both in their discursive and literary dimensions, and pay close attention to what male and female writers had to say about the social and cultural make-up of their respective societies. After all, language and communication are

Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 119 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002).

¹⁴ See my introduction to *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen, 2004.

¹⁵ See, for example, the contributions to *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler. *The New Middle Ages* (New York and London: Garland, 1997); *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz. *Medieval Culture*, 11 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formation of Masculinity in Late Middle Europe*. *The Middle Ages Series* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). For more theoretical, at times speculative, though still provocative insights, see Karma Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

social constructs and both reflect the make-up and structure of every society, and determine the social interactions between individuals and groups, hence between genders as well. Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet confirm this observation from a modern perspective: "the dominant ideology and linguistic conventions are not static. They are constructed, maintained, elaborated, and changed in action, and quite crucially in talk. Change does not happen in individual actions, but in the accumulation of action throughout the social fabric."¹⁶ Moreover, our perception of gender relationships both in economic and political terms and within the world of literature, the arts, and of religion, is determined by the "gender order and linguistic conventions [that] exercise a profound constraint on our thoughts and actions, predisposing us to follow patterns set down over generations and throughout our own development" (55). We learn to perceive these patterns and gain the necessary energy to deconstruct such patterns by interrupting their traditional evolution within the history of literature. As the individual studies in this book, focused on specific topics and writers, will illustrate, writing, even in the Middle Ages, was not really gender-specific, whereas modern literary scholarship has, for much too long, employed gender criteria to marginalize, or even exclude, the numerous voices by women writers. With respect to mystical literature, for instance, Kate Greenspan convincingly emphasizes: "Their autohagiographies offered imitable models for all humankind, inspiring their contemporaries, male and female, to strive for transcendence. . . . in autohagiographies as in other medieval religious literature, the sex of the author was ultimately beside the point."¹⁷

Every text and art work has to be evaluated not only by its intrinsic values, but also by its impact on and relationship with its audience, in almost all cases probably consisting of a mixed audience. This has tremendous consequences for the choice of a literary genre, or the mode of speech which a woman writer might select in order to come to terms with her personal concerns and to reach a public willing to listen to her, a profound issue which already Virginia Woolf had formulated in unmistakable terms.¹⁸ But it seems questionable whether the "psychosexual development in western societies leaves women in an uneasy relation to language, their access to public discourse at best limited."¹⁹ There is no clear evidence, at least for the medieval world, that women have always been

¹⁶ Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 53.

¹⁷ Kate Greenspan, "Autohagiography and Medieval Women's Spiritual Autobiography," *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1996), 216–36; here 232.

¹⁸ Quoted from Deborah Cameron, ed., *Language: The Feminist Critique*. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1998), 49.

¹⁹ Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender*, 108.

forced to transgress strict power limits and cultural taboos in order to participate in the public discourse, as the many examples of outstanding female poets and performers both as figures within courtly romances composed by male poets (Isolde in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*, Nicolette in *Aucassin et Nicolette*) and in reality document.²⁰ Both the famous tale collection by Boccaccio, his *Decameron* (ca. 1350), and Chaucer's monumental *Canterbury Tales* (ca. 1400), but no less Heinrich Kaufringer's numerous *mæren* (ca. 1400–1415), and the countless anonymous late-medieval German and Italian narratives of the same kind, not to mention those in other languages, reflect the intensive, often truly delightful, humorous, sarcastic, ironic, and moralistic discourse between the genders and reveal how much both sides were invited to participate in the debate. In sixteenth-century French literature, for instance, Marguerite de Navarre demonstrated, through the publication of her *Heptaméron*, that women fully knew how to participate in this discourse as well. Certainly, this is a very late example; here nevertheless it is a powerful indication of the deceptiveness of our traditional approach to the gender issues in the premodern period at large.²¹

Even though modern research results indicate that men tend to talk more than women and easily dominate in a communicative situation, and even though traditional power structures at least in the Western world until today reflect a deeply anchored patriarchy, it would be rather problematic to transfer these psycho-linguistic data and the results of political analysis to the historical situation of women in the Middle Ages—a generalization by itself that cannot be accepted by any stretch of imagination.²²

More specifically, it would be erroneous to assume that all male authors pursued a monolithic perspective, representing nothing but male interests, whereas women authors were only arguing for their own gender. There were many different voices, different attitudes and opinions regarding marriage, sexuality, chastity, public influence, social and economic roles, and power structures. More often than not physical violence was dealt with constructively, and peaceful settlements between the sexes were sought after, both among members of the aristocratic and

²⁰ Cora Kaplan, "Language and Gender," 1986, here quoted from Cameron, ed., *Language*, 54–64; here 63. For the radically changing gender situation in late-medieval German literary history, see my *Late-Medieval German Women's Poetry: Secular and Religious Songs*. Library of Medieval Women (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2004); for recent approaches to so-called women's songs, see *Medieval Woman's Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches*, ed. Anne L. Klinck and Ann Marie Rasmussen. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

²¹ Elizabeth Zegura, "True Stories and Alternative Discourses: The Game of Love in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*," *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 278 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 351–68.

²² Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender*, 114–22.

the peasant class, though often with rather little success. Globally speaking, it would be erroneous to argue that women have always been victims and had little or no influence on their society, and hence also in the Middle Ages; instead our modern assessment of women's writing heavily depends on the selection of texts, on our perceptive filters, on our awareness of different types of modes of speech and writing, and on our concept of what constitutes 'literature' in the first place. With respect to a plethora of hybrid texts produced by late-medieval women, Anne Winston-Allen confirms: "For the most part, these women's texts are not finished literary works or intended as such, but examples of utilitarian record keeping and narrative accounts that were written down 'for the record,' as a witness to current and future generations. Yet, despite all the factual, historical, and financial data contained in them, cloister chronicles are also representations that select out of the everyday certain events to which the writer wants to give particular significance. Although not considered 'literature' in the traditional sense, chronicles are literary fictions just as much as they are 'documents,' a distinction that New Cultural historians have for the most part abandoned as moot, if not meaningless."²³ Of course, there is no doubt that men have traditionally dominated public conversations, both in oral and in written form. Nevertheless, by the same token we need to keep in mind that nineteenth-century feminist struggles to free women from patriarchal rule deeply influenced the intellectual horizon of many literary historians who then projected their contemporary understanding of the gender relationship back to the Middle Ages. Both power structures and the subsequent linguistic distribution of influence are the results of endless negotiations, and a sensitive reexamination of medieval German and European literature in light of these modern observations promises to yield surprisingly far-reaching results.²⁴

The complex situation of medieval courtly, but also urban, literature has become a matter of fact for recent scholarship, which is much more attuned to the difficulty to categorize and identify individual texts and the author's intentions, implied or explicitly stated. In light of these observations there is no doubt that any study of women's participation in the public discourse at a given time has to incorporate male and female voices, which necessitates the study of the interaction between the two genders on the broadest possible scale. I hope to advance this new understanding through multiple approaches, sometimes by examining specific women's voices, then by investigating men's attitudes toward violence committed against women, or by analyzing how individual male poets project their female characters and how women poets discuss cases of conflict between the

²³ Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing About Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 15.

²⁴ See Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender*, 111–22, et passim.

genders.

When we investigate a culture in which rampant misogyny and deeply-seated fear of the seductiveness of the human flesh were the common topics, such as in the world of the Church Fathers in late antiquity, statements about the genders have to be examined with specially care and sensitivity. For instance, it seems to be highly questionable and not advisable to accept those texts which systematically and viciously attacked women in their performance as Eve's eternal daughters as entirely descriptive and normative when they were really primarily prescriptive, or argumentative. Diatribes directed against women might, at some times, reveal nothing but that the authors rallied against certain social conditions or cultural structures which might even have favoured women.

Misogyny, as expressed in literary documents, is not automatically an indication of women's complete subjugation; instead, misogynist statements reflect men's fear, opposition, uncertainty, and individual insecurity, particularly within a world where courtly love dominates and forces men to submit to ladies who are, in a way, beyond their reach, as James A. Schultz has argued recently.²⁵ In other words, gender itself in its social connotations proves to be a topic of a constructive, dialogic nature, and reveals its discursive quality in light of ever changing interactions between men and women within the world of literature, and, by the same token, in human society at large. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet categorically lend their full support to this observation: "Gender is not something we are born with, and not something we *have*, but something we do . . . —something we *perform*. . . . Sex is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the social elaboration of biological sex. Gender builds on biological sex."²⁶ In this regard literary documents reveal much more about the constructed nature of the gender relationship in the past than political or religious texts, normally written for and by members of the ruling class of male aristocrats.

Even though the vast majority of art objects and literary works since time immemorial seem to have been produced by men, nevertheless "female writers and artists did," as Susan L. Smith claims, "utilize the *topos* [of the strong woman] in a few instances, and some of its diverse formulations are spoken in a female voice or addressed to a specifically female audience and question whether the power of women over men is always to be condemned."²⁷ In other words, all social hierarchies are the results of historical processes, which the literary and cultural

²⁵ James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 173–188.

²⁶ Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender*, 10.

²⁷ Susan L. Smith, *The Power of Women: A Topos in Medieval Art and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 3; see also Ángela Muñoz, *La escritura femenina. De leer a escribir* (Madrid: Asociación Cultural Al-Mudayna, 2000).

works mirror in a highly complex manner. There are no simple fantasy products, and the less a poet seems to write about concrete conditions concerning the gender relationship, the more his or her text provides access to the audience expectations and projections, and also to the writer's mentality.²⁸

Beyond the primarily hermeneutic expanse of this topos, however, we can also identify female subjects throughout medieval literature who energetically fought for their individuality both in the political and the artistic/literary sphere.²⁹ Although I shall occasionally turn to historically well-known figures, the primary focus of this study will rest on those women who took up the pen and joined the public discourse through their written words. Significantly, even male writers often recognized that they did not want to subscribe to an absolute form of patriarchy and wanted, or were simply forced, to share both their private and public space with women, whether we think of St. Boniface, Peter Abelard, Bernard of Clairvaux, or Meister Eckhart, to mention only a few of the most famous medieval scholars and theologians who closely interacted with women, exerted great influence on them, and were also shaped by their ideas and desires.³⁰

Highly impressive poets and writers such as Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, Herrad of Landsberg, and Hildegard von Bingen had, from as early as the tenth through the early twelfth century, already paved the way for their numerous female successors in the subsequent centuries, carving a specific space for themselves.³¹ With their works they demonstrated that learning, knowledge, and wisdom are not gender-specific and that the world of literature could be as open to men as to women if the power structure allowed them to write.³² Women's influence on and

²⁸ *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte: Hauptthemen in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. Peter Dinzelbacher. Kröners Taschenausgabe, 469 (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1993); id., *Europa im Hochmittelalter 1050–1250: Eine Kultur- und Mentalitätsgeschichte. Kultur und Mentalität* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2003).

²⁹ Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts. Women of Letters* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997).

³⁰ *Der frauwen buoch. Versuche zu einer feministischen Mediävistik*, ed. Ingrid Bennewitz. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 517 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1989); *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages: An Anthology of Feminist Approaches to Middle High German Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 528 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991); for a special case study focusing on the famous Heloise, see Constant J. Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard: Perceptions of Dialogue in Twelfth-Century France*. With a translation by Neville Chiavaroli and Constant J. Mews. The New Middle Ages (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999). For the considerable influence of male theologians through female mystics, as in the case of Meister Eckhart, see Bernhard McGinn...

³¹ This finds powerful confirmation in Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg's study, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500–1100* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), though she is more concerned with the presentation of female saints than with women's literary voices.

³² Unfortunately, the doctoral dissertation by Eva Parra Membrives, "Escritores alemanas en monesterios medievales," Universidad de Sevilla, 1997, which offers a wealth of theoretical and

participation in secular literature became truly noticeable in the late twelfth century. We could more or less claim the same phenomenon for the public influence, if not political power itself during this period. The "nouvelle parole," as Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt have called the new discursive interaction between men and women since at least the twelfth century,³³ in particular proved to be accessible to lay and clerical women writers as well. Whereas women's voices had emerged during earlier times only in exceptional cases—or are known to us today only in small traces because the majority of them might not have been recorded in writing—the twelfth century seems to have witnessed a considerable change also with respect to the gender relationship in the world of the arts and literature.³⁴ The increasing use of the vernacular as an acceptable language for public discourse—illustrated by the ruling of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 that sermons were to be preached in the vernacular³⁵—represents a remarkable change in the power structure of the entire courtly society, particularly because the traditional educational institutions lost some of their exclusively authoritative positions and had to compete with an increasing number of individuals and also schools relying on different sets of values and ideals. This claim on power can best be characterized as "control of speech that was played out under the heterogeneous and dynamic social conditions of the later Middle Ages."³⁶ Significantly, this "control of speech" was increasingly contested throughout the medieval period because more and more women also realized the impact which the free use of words both in public and in private, both in writing and on the oral level, had on individual speakers and their audience.³⁷ Christine de Pizan can probably be identified as the most outspoken female writer in the entire Middle Ages, as Barbara Newman, among many others,

pragmatic discussions relevant for our own approaches here, has not yet been published. I would like to thank Dr. Parra for letting me consult her own copy during a short stay at the Universidad de Sevilla as a visiting guest professor, March 2004.

³³ Jacques LeGoff and Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Au XIII^e siècle. Une nouvelle parole," *Histoire vécue du peuple chrétien*, ed. Jean Delumeau. 2 vols (Toulouse: Privat, 1979), 257–79; here 259.

³⁴ C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), claims that the innovation of the twelfth-century intellectual life is intimately connected with the discovery of women's considerable contribution to the emotional life in man's existence, 157: "the most visible reason [for the loss of innocence in the discourse of ennobling love] was the inclusion of women in a social code that until then had been almost exclusively the preserve of men."

³⁵ Herbert Wolf, "Predigt," *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte* Werner Kohlschmidt and Wolfgang Mohr. Vol. 3. 2nd ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1966), 223–57; here 227.

³⁶ Susan L. Smith, *The Power of Women*, 15.

³⁷ For an illustration of how much women contributed to the entire (!) history of German literature, see *Frauen in der deutschen Literaturgeschichte: Die ersten 800 Jahre. Ein Lesebuch*. Ausgewählt, übersetzt und kommentiert von Albrecht Classen. *Women in German Literature*, 4 (New York, Washington, D.C., et al.: Peter Lang, 2000).

suggests in her recent study on the allegorical use of Dame Nature.³⁸ At a closer analysis, however, many other medieval women authors and poets knew well how to defend their gender and how to make their voices heard, even if their choice of language and genres seems to be far removed from postmodern feminist discourse and sometimes even appear to embrace patriarchal values and ideals.

Mutatis mutandis, the social and political demarcation line between the two genders has hardly ever been drawn as strictly and distinctly as traditional scholarship had assumed, assigning absolute power and influence to men, and subordination and silence to women. The concept of courtly love—as it had developed since the early twelfth century—deeply undermined the traditional norms of the traditional warrior-class and opened intriguing perspectives toward new gender relations. As C. Stephen Jaeger observes, “We know that lay noblewomen insert themselves into the game of courtship and create the social circumstances in which ‘virtue’ and social rank become interchangeable concepts, so that the old Ciceronian notion of friendship as love of virtue translated into ‘love raises the worth of lovers.’”³⁹ Both emotive and practical issues resulting from new social-economic, but also climatic, technological, and intellectual changes, not to forget legal and moral aspects,⁴⁰ required individuals all over Europe to experiment with new types of interactive communications, especially at the courts where innovative communicative communities emerged which certainly crossed gender lines and forced an opening of traditional power structures.⁴¹ Whereas common and popular arguments held that medieval societies were determined by the large patriarchal family ruled by the fathers, we

³⁸ Barbara Newman, “Did Goddesses Empower Women? The Case of Dame Nature,” *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages* Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 135–55.; Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan. Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea Books, 1984); Rosalind Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women. Reading Beyond Gender*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³⁹ Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*, 105–06.

⁴⁰ For an extensive, comparative analysis, see Michael Mitterauer, *Warum Europa? Mittelalterliche Grundlagen eines Sonderwegs* (Munich: Beck, 2003), 70–108; he emphasizes, above all, the characteristic role of the marriage model which focused on the married couple, and not on the larger, patriarchal family (ancestors), and the relatively high age of people when they married: “In Europa stellt die Suche nach einem Partner ein wichtiges Element der Jugendkultur dar” (105; In Europe, the search for a marriage partner represents an important element of the youth culture).

⁴¹ Joan W. Scott, “Gender: a Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 1053–75; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 234–37. See also the contributions to *Speaking in the Medieval World* Jean E. Godsall-Myers. Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions. Medieval and Early Modern Peoples, 16 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003); for an overview of communication in the Middle Ages, see Horst Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen, Schrift und Bild: Kultur und Gedächtnis im Mittelalter* (Munich: Beck, 1995). For a discussion of dialogues, see 245–52.

have recently learned that the conjugal family, which provided women with many more avenues to exert themselves, was more often the case than not.⁴² This difference in perception has far-reaching consequences for gender relationships both in economic-political terms and with respect to women's power to speak up in public, to write, and to create art, literature, and music.

It would be impossible to determine when precisely the ancient attitude toward women, at least as far as the Church Fathers and their followers were concerned, describing women as nothing but the representatives of the flesh—men were regarded as the representatives of the spirit—gave way to more open-minded attitudes, subsequently treating women as individuals first, and as sexual beings only second. It seems rather doubtful, however, to accept official statements by members of the clergy as truly representative of the social conditions under which women lived during the early Middle Ages. On the contrary, a careful analysis of the relevant statements by Tertullian, St. John Chrysostom, St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, and St. Augustine, among others, would also quite easily reveal the discursive character of their treatises and sermons, which might make them serendipitously precursors of the late-medieval *querelle des femmes*.⁴³ Unfortunately, our concrete knowledge of women and women writers in the early medieval period is fairly limited because, as Lisa M. Bitel underscores, we “continue to study what the tribal historians wrote, although we know that they forgot to bring along their women.”⁴⁴

Based on what we can learn from courtly literature since the twelfth century, we can affirm that women increasingly enjoyed considerable respect in public and in turn quickly learned how to participate in the game of love which was predicated on the conflicts and exchanges between the genders.⁴⁵ The fact that love itself was regarded as a problematic phenomenon that required intensive discussions and

⁴² Danièle Alexandre-Bidon and Didier Lett, *Children in the Middle Ages: Fifth-Fifteenth Centuries*. Preface by Pierre Riché, transl. by Jody Gladding. The Laura Shannon Series in French Medieval Studies (1997; Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 53–54; see also Peter Fleming, *Family and Household in Medieval England*. Social History in Perspective (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 6–18.

⁴³ See the text selection, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires, with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 50–82. For the long-term tradition of this *querelle*, see Margaret L. King, Albert Rabil, Jr., “Introduction to the Series,” in: Laura Cereta, *Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist*. Transcribed, transl., and ed. by Diana Robin. The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), vii–xxv.

⁴⁴ Lisa M. Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe*, 268.

⁴⁵ This is perhaps best expressed in Ulrich von Liechtenstein's famous *Frauendienst* (ca. 1255) where the protagonist organizes a huge tour of tournaments, himself disguised as Lady Venus, thereby giving courtly ladies the highest rank in his own game. See Jan-Dirk Müller, “Lachen - Spiel - Fiktion. Zum Verhältnis von literarischem Diskurs und historischer Realität im ‘Frauendienst’ Ulrichs von Liechtenstein,” *ibid.*, *Minnesang und Literaturtheorie*, ed. Ute von Bloh and Armin Schulz, et al. (1984; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), 1–38.

explorations signals that both genders were intimately involved in the public discourse about the meaning of eroticism and love.⁴⁶ In so far as misogyny in medieval literature has to be treated with the grain of salt, particularly because it would have been more a source of highly dialectical discourse involving both sexes than a truly deeply-seated hatred of women,⁴⁷ we need to probe further women's position within this debate. This is not to deny that medieval culture was characterized by strongly patriarchal features, yet such a starkly black-and-white picture tends to blend out more of the details than to give us a true idea of concrete conditions.

In particular, as has often been observed, mystical visions and prophetic revelations experienced by a growing number of religious women since the twelfth century also turned out to be a major vehicle for women to claim their own status within the world of Christian religion and hence also within their society. But these revelations did not only provoke deep admiration. They also caused many male theologians, such as Lamprecht of Regensburg (fl. ca. 1250), to wonder aloud how it was possible that unlearned women could achieve such deep insights into the Godhead. In a way, we observe here a fertile development of the gender debate triggered by women's contention that they could be as much graced by God as men and that abstract learning was not the *conditio sine qua non* for a religious vision and, subsequently, for the creation of a written text. In other words, mystically influenced women not only explored innovative approaches to the Godhead through individualized visions, but they also challenged the male power structure, and forced their contemporaries to join them in an intensive discourse concerning political influence for women within the religious and the public sphere.⁴⁸

The history of medieval literature offers profound insights into an ongoing debate about gender, about competing concepts of what constitutes an individual, and therefore also about contrasting tropes of women as bearers of power and women as the idols of courtly society. Indeed, literary interaction between men and women has as much to do with the rise of courtly society freeing itself from the traditions of the old warrior mentality at least since the eleventh century, as with the development of new power structures both at the courts and in the

⁴⁶ For a pertinent text selection, see *Eroticism and Love in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen. 5th ed. (1994; New York: Forbes, 2004).

⁴⁷ Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); see also Catherine Brown, *Contrary Things: Exegesis, Dialectic, and the Poetics of Didacticism. Figurae* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Sarah Kay, *Courtly Contradictions: the Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century. Figurae* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

⁴⁸ This has been studied by Peter Dinzelbacher in numerous publications, see, for example, *Mittelalterliche Frauenmystik* (Paderborn, Munich, et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1993), 31–46.

cities.⁴⁹ Not surprisingly, during the period from the patristic period (fourth century) until the twelfth century, the trope of the powerful woman was a negative battle cry for male clerics who were afraid of losing their influence over society. The high pitch by Bernard of Morval, better known as Bernard of Cluny, in his hysteric criticism of women in his poem "De contemptu mundi" (middle of the twelfth century) indicates the degree to which this poet was aware of major changes affecting the male position within his society. He obviously realized, as we may argue *ex negativo*, that the patriarchal power struggle against the emergence of a society in which discourse, negotiations, and arguments invited both men and women to exchange opinions in public, to discuss their differences and similarities, and to accept contrastive concepts, attitudes, and value systems as essential for the further development of the literature at the courts and in the cities, was basically lost.⁵⁰ Bernard might have also relied on a satirical approach, playing with the rhetorical tradition, especially because his statements about women seem excessive and almost absurd to a point where laughter would set in:

Woman is foul, burning to deceive, a flame of fury, our first destruction, the worst portion, the robber of decency. O cruel sin! She expels her own seed from her womb, and in a depraved series she cuts off the fetus which has been brought forth, casts it away, kills it. Woman is a serpent, not a human being but a wild beast, and she is not even faithful to herself. She is the murderess of her own flesh and blood, in fact the first of her kind; she is more savage than an asp, more furious than madmen.⁵¹

Even though members of the clergy throughout the medieval period tried to build space between themselves and the female sex, such vehement and vitriolic language as used by Bernard could not have been accepted as serious even among the most ardent misogynists. He went so far as to reject even the origin of all mankind, woman's womb. As John Balnaves observes, "Heloise and Hildegard of Bingen, as well as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, and, at least implicitly, Marie de France, expressed acceptance of the view that women were subordinate to men, but for none of them did it entail inferiority in intelligence, morality or spirituality."⁵² This is convincingly confirmed by Ronald E. Pepin, according to

⁴⁹ Leo D. Lefebure, "Authority, Violence, and the Sacred at the Medieval Court," *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 37–66.

⁵⁰ Susan L. Smith, *The Power of Women*, 31–33.

⁵¹ Ronald E. Pepin, *Scorn for the World: Bernard of Cluny's De Contemptu Mundi: The Latin Text with English Translation and an Introduction*. Medieval Texts and Studies, 8 (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1991), Book 2, 509–15.

⁵² John Balnaves, "Bernard of Morlaix: The Literature of Complaint, the Latin Tradition and the Twelfth-Century 'Renaissance'." Ph.D. dissertation, Canberra, Australian National University, 1997, ch. 4; here quoted from the online version at: <http://www.prosient.com.au/balnaves/johnbalnaves/dissch4.asp>; <http://www.prosient.com.au/balnaves/johnbalnaves/dissmain.asp> (last accessed on Feb. 23, 2007).

whom the fact that Bernard “found such exaggerations at all funny, that he invented (and borrowed) such a mordant vocabulary, suggests that our poet recognized satire’s conventional antifeminism and sought to rival the contributions of his predecessors.”⁵³ Quite similar conclusions can be drawn from Andreas Capellanus’s treatise *De amore* (ca. 1190),⁵⁴ where the highly misogynist tirade in the third book is intriguingly matched by the extraordinarily positive description of intelligent, educated, and rhetorically thoroughly schooled women in the first two books. This suggests that Andreas primarily intended to provoke his audience and satirically played with the anti-women tropes espoused both by the church fathers and medieval religious writers such as Bernard of Cluny.⁵⁵

Indeed, traditional misogyny, though continually used throughout the centuries by the representatives of the Church, lost much of its theological luster and ideological viciousness, and transformed into a significant topic of literary discussions involving authors of both genders, whether we turn to courtly love lyric, courtly romances, or verse narratives in rhymed couplets. What happened in public discourse during the high Middle Ages was not the radical reversal of the topos of the powerful woman as a hateful proposition directed against the female gender, but instead its translation into a point of discussion every intellectual was familiar with, without rejecting its multiple, if not even contradictory, implications any longer.⁵⁶

As Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees confirm, “a defense of woman alone can put the more general conversations about women circulating in the Middle Ages into the particular shape of a debate, and not only because of the chronological precedence of accusatory literature.”⁵⁷ Even though misogyny as a narrative strategy at times experienced a remarkable invigoration, such as in the case of Jean de Meun’s continuation of the *Roman de la Rose*, the evolution of an increasingly secular society in which women shared much more of private and public power, deconstructed the clerical agenda underlying traditional misogyny and transferred it to the area of ludic debate.⁵⁸

⁵³ Ronald E. Pepin, *Scorn for the World*, xvii.

⁵⁴ Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*. With Introduction, transl., and notes by John Jay Parry. Records of Civilization in Norton Paperback Editions (1941; New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1969).

⁵⁵ Albrecht Classen, *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung: Die Suche nach der kommunikativen Gemeinschaft in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2002), 53–107.

⁵⁶ Susan L. Smith, *The Power of Women*, 51.

⁵⁷ Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees, “Introduction,” *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance* Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees. *The New Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 1–18; here 4.

⁵⁸ See my introduction and the various contribution to *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and*

Whenever we come across literary statements about gender, however, we also need to keep in mind that those voices are mostly fictional and do not necessarily represent factual statements or reflections of social realities. As Monica Brzezinski Potkay and Regula Meyer Evitt observe: "Andreas Capellanus's courtly ladies, then, do not primarily portray women his readers encountered, nor does the Wife of Bath realistically depict a fourteenth-century English bourgeoisie. Female characters in medieval texts on the whole do not so much reflect historical women as an idea of the feminine."⁵⁹ Nevertheless, just as in modern times, literary reflections of gender debates seem to shed light both on the actual discourse taking place in public, and provide the latter with the general framework for further investigations. To be sure, neither Andreas Capellanus's *De amore* nor Bernard of Cluny's *De contemptu mundi* were reflections of actual intellectual exchanges that took place in public. Yet, the considerable popularity that both authors enjoyed over the next centuries demonstrates that their treatises appealed to a wider audience, provoking and entertaining them with their often outlandish claims and opinions, but also inviting debate, controversy, challenges, and opposition.

However, in order to gain access to this literary discourse about gender which raged throughout the Middle Ages, affecting both the Church and the schools, both the courts and the urban society, we also have to accept a different definition of literature, which includes many religious, didactic, scientific and other types of texts in which women either expressed themselves or in which they were examined through the lense of male perspectives.⁶⁰

Not surprisingly, for example, many male authors expressed specific opinions about the types of texts that should be available for young female readers, such as Vincent of Beauvais (1184/94–ca. 1264), Giles of Rome (1243/47–1316), Thomasin von Zerclaere (after 1285–ca. 1259), Ulrich von Liechtenstein (ca. 1200–ca. 1275), and Hugo von Trimberg (ca. 1230–ca. 1310).⁶¹ Nevertheless, as the vast corpus of mystical texts, mostly composed by female writers, suggests, these prescriptive guidelines did not necessarily offer an absolute framework for women's education and literature.⁶² It would seem speculative to regard such didactic approaches as

Studies, 278 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004).

⁵⁹ Monica Brzezinski Potkay and Regula Meyer Evitt, *Minding the Body: Women and Literature in the Middle Ages, 800–1500*. Twayne's Women and Literature Series (London, Mexico City, et al.: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 4–5.

⁶⁰ Brzezinski and Evitt, *Minding the Body*, 194–95.

⁶¹ Susanne Barth, *Jungfrauenzucht: Literaturwissenschaftliche und pädagogische Studien zur Mädchenerziehungsliteratur zwischen 1200 und 1600* (Stuttgart: M & P Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1994), 62–96.

⁶² Ursula Peters, "Vita religiosa und spirituelles Erleben. Frauenmystik und frauenmystische Literatur im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert," *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler. Vol. 1 (Munich: Beck, 1988), 88–109. With respect to Margarethe Ebner, Peters observes, 107: "Das Schreiben ist hier Movens der Rekapitulation spiritueller Erfahrungen und zugleich verstärkendes Medium der

the norm prevalent at that time, because otherwise these authors would not have felt a need to formulate their statements about girls' recommendable reading material. More important, these aforementioned authors, and probably many others, deemed it necessary to outline rules and guidelines for their educational system, hoping thereby also to influence the power relationship between men and women.

A remarkable example of a powerful narrative by a highly influential woman is provided by the *Memorias* (memoirs) composed by the Andalusian noblewoman Leonor López de Córdoba (ca. 1412). These at first sight seem to be determined by religious and perhaps also political intentions, but at closer analysis they demonstrate that they are a literary forum for the writer to establish her own identity within society by means of the written word.⁶³ In this sense, writing here emerges as one of the most effective tools to position oneself within the public struggle for influence, reputation, esteem, and power. Moreover, in this context the difference between fictional and non-fictional does not have any real significance, especially if we consider the public function of this text, obviously appealing to a mixed audience, aiming for influence on the political structure, and establishing an individualized medium for Leonor to formulate her basic thoughts, concerns, and ideals.⁶⁴ As Lia Vozzo Mendia argues, "en el momento mismo en el que escribe su texto Leonor tiene nuevamente algo que ver con el poder femenino, el reconocido y evidente de la reina y aquel otro subterráneo de las intrigas de las damas de la corte. Dentro de este universo en el que las mujeres cuentan o pueden contar mucho, Leonor lucha con todas las armas que tiene a su disposición para ganarse, a su vez, una posición que le permita ejercer un poder efectivo sobre el real" (in the same moment when she writes her text, Leonor achieves something new which is connected with female power, the recognized and evident power of the queen and the subliminal power which the ladies of the court achieved

Begnadung" (Here, writing proves to be the motivating force to recapitulate the spiritual experiences and concomitantly the intensifying medium for the gift of grace).

⁶³ Lia Vozzo Mendia, *Leonor López de Córdoba. Memorie*. Biblioteca medievale, 20 (Parma: Pratiche Editrice, 1992), 27–28, emphasizes that the *Memorias* "en el contexto en que se producen, adquieren un valor especial, proponiéndose como símbolo de una vida vivida . . . con la firme convicción de poder ser sujeto de su propia historia" (in the context in which they are produced, they acquire a special value, offering themselves as a symbol of a lived life . . . with the firm conviction that she can be the subject of her own history). We will observe the same phenomenon with respect to the memoirs by Helene Kottannerin and the quasi-mystical discourse by Margery Kempe in the respective chapters. For Leonor's text, see Reinaldo Ayerbe-Chaux, ed., "Las 'Memorias' de doña Leonor López de Córdoba," *Journal of Hispanic Philology* II (1977–1978): 11–33.

⁶⁴ Lia Vozzo Mendia, *Leonor López de Córdoba*, 27–28; Albrecht Classen, "Literary or Not? The Fictionality Debate in Autobiographical Writings by a Fifteenth-Century German Woman Writer: Helene Kottanner's *Memoirs*," *Medieval Perspectives* 19 (2006): 64–90.

through intrigue. In this universe in which the women speak or can speak much, Leonor fights with all the weapons at her disposal to gain, through her own voice, a position that would permit her to exercise an effective power over the real world).

Undoubtedly, male writers by far dominate the surviving corpus of medieval literature. Nevertheless it would be erroneous to accept the traditional concept of medieval society as one in which women were entirely subdued, subordinated, and muted subjects, when in many cases the opposite could be claimed depending on the circumstances and individual cases. Both in the world of marriage and in the political sphere, women and men learned to interact with each other, though the negotiation process was continuous and required numerous adjustments and modifications according to the influence of the individual, the family background, and the person's social status.⁶⁵ Apart from many powerful queens and other high-ranking noble women who held significant power positions within or through their families, women of lower social rank could also assume a wide variety of functions, such as Ela, countess of Salisbury (1189–1261), who bought the privilege from King Henry III to hold "the powerful, lucrative and highly political public office of sheriff of Wiltshire."⁶⁶ However, the contemporary chronicles hardly mention her, and then, alas, mostly only as "a footnote to the deeds of her husband, William Longespee, . . . , and of her son, William, who died on crusade in 1250."⁶⁷ Although these important functions did not directly translate into literary and artistic expressions, such historical observations invite further investigations as to women's actual voices within the literary discourse.⁶⁸

Before we move on, let us consider briefly some of the best known medieval queens or duchesses who commanded full respect both as lords and as women,

⁶⁵ For a diverse range of historical and social-critical approaches pertaining to this issue, see *Women, Marriage, and Family in Medieval Christendom: Essays in Memory of Michael M. Sheehan, C.S.B.*, ed. Constance M. Rousseau and Joel T. Rosenthal. Studies in Medieval Culture, XXXVII (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998).

⁶⁶ Christine Owens, "Noblewomen and Political Activity," *Women in Medieval Western European Culture*, ed. Linda E. Mitchell. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 2007 (New York and London: Garland, 1999), 209–19, here 209; Jennifer Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe, 1200–1500* (London et al.: Longman, 2002), 119–32.

⁶⁷ Owens, "Noblewomen and Political Activity," 210.

⁶⁸ Krueger, *Women Readers*, xiii. She add the noteworthy comment: "But the richly ambiguous texts . . . suggest that the genre also records and fosters critical resistance. Even as they espoused an ideology of courtliness that cast women as object, Old French courtly verse romances created a discursive space for debate about gender issues. The implied female public and the inscribed women readers of Old French verse romances are the fictional traces of voices in a dialogue whose words are lost. These fictional inscriptions may be viewed as the indirect precursors of the historical women who actively rewrote the masculine plot of desire." (xiv)

whether we think of the German Empresses Kunigunde, Gisela, and Agnes, of the Spanish Queen Urraca, the English Queen Eleonore of Aquitaine, or Queen Isabeau of France.⁶⁹ As Kimberly A. LoPrete concludes, with specific reference to Adela of Blois (ca. 1067–1137), but also taking into account other eleventh- through thirteenth-century female rulers, “To remove lordly women from the history of women by casting them as honorary men thus occludes the social dynamics inherent in a political system grounded in the demographics of lordly families that regularly and routinely produced some women whose traditional activities as daughters, wives and widows placed them at the centre of public affairs.”⁷⁰ Adela’s case powerfully illustrates that the public discourse was not only gender-oriented, but instead also allowed for the significant differentiation between individuals and their political position irrespective of their sexual identity. In LoPrete’s words again: “The powers of medieval noblewomen were those of lords. The extent to which lordly powers had a private domestic core as well as a public political face is the extent to which women as females could be viewed as legitimately wielding powers of command over others and intervening in public events without sinning against either the socio-political or the gender logic of their day.”⁷¹

It seems reasonable to conclude from these glimpses into the past that this space of political freedom also made it possible for women to pick up the pen and to write love poetry, verse romances, hagiographical texts, to mention just a few relevant genres. Eleanore of Aquitaine might be a good case in point, although she was not a poet per se. Her intensive patronage, however, both of poetry and the visual arts, indicates the extent to which political power could indeed translate into literary power.⁷²

In fact, recent scholarship has been enormously successful in uncovering more and more texts by medieval women writers. Concomitantly, we also begin to establish a much more diversified perspective on how male authors regarded the other gender, often treating their female protagonists with considerable respect and even admiration.⁷³ Many times we can discover that medieval authors directly

⁶⁹ *Frauen des Mittelalters in Lebensbildern* Karl Rudolf Schnith (Graz, Vienna, and Cologne: Styria, 1997); *Medieval Queenship* John Carmi Parsons (1993; New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998).

⁷⁰ Kimberly A. LoPrete, “The Gender of Lordly Women: the Case of Adela of Blois,” *Pauns or Players*, 90–110; here 110; see also *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France*, ed. T. Evergates (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Kimberly A. LoPrete, *Adela of Blois, Countess and Lord, c. 1067–1137* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2001).

⁷¹ LoPrete, “The Gender,” 110.

⁷² See the contributions to *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. June Hall McCash (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996). For Eleanore, see 6–8, 36–37, 127–31, et passim.

⁷³ Again and again, specialized studies have demonstrated the far-reaching self-confidence and

challenged shortcomings within their society, especially conflicts and a variety of forms of violence specifically affecting women. The more preachers attempted to reject women as the arch-seductresses of men, as the absolute incarnation of the flesh, and hence as the weak entrance gate through which the devil was capable of entering men's souls and minds, the more the admittedly relatively few voices by female writers demonstrated their strength and energy in overcoming the clerical barriers and in claiming a stake within their own society.⁷⁴ However, we would revive another stereotype if we assumed that all medieval women pursued the same goals and embraced their own gender as the all-consuming hermeneutical category relevant for their personal lives. In other words, each writer, whether male or female, has to be seen within her or his social context, age bracket, geographical and political framework, intellectual and religious upbringing, and personal experiences.⁷⁵

Moreover, medieval women were surely not fending for themselves in a losing battle against overarching patriarchy; they did not find themselves in a stark polarity poised against men, and therefore perhaps on a lost post, verging on slavery. Christine de Pizan's political arguments and energetic defense against male stereotypes reverberated throughout the fifteenth century, but she was not the first, and certainly not the last, powerful woman writer. She also enjoyed considerable support by many male contemporaries, such as Jean Gerson,

assertiveness of medieval women writers, such as Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, see Eva Parra Membrives, "Convención estética como medio de menajeación. La mujer literaria en los textos medievales femeninos," *Tradición e innovación en los estudios de lengua, literatura y cultura alemanes en España. Actas del I Congreso Hispalense de Germanistas*, ed. Grupo de Investigación Filología Alemana (Sevilla: Kronos Universidad, 1998), 259–67; ead., "Deseos y seducción. Imágenes de sexualidad y erotismo en *Gongolfus* y *Calimachus* de Roswitha de Gandersheim," *Philologia Hispalensis* 15 (2002): 7–21.

⁷⁴ María Milagros Rivera Garretas, *Textos y Espacios de Mujeres (Europa, siglos IV–XV)* (Barcelona: Icaria, 1995), 211: "a partir de la experiencia un tanto desigual, las mujeres han pensado el mundo y han escrito sus obras de otra manera" (based on completely different experiences, the women have thought about the world and have written their works in a different way); for surprisingly different perspectives among fourth- to sixth-century poets regarding Eve, see John Flood, "A Source for the depiction of Eve in the Early-Modern Period: Biblical Latin Epic of the Fifth and Sixth Centuries," *Pawn or Players?*, ed. Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless. *Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women* (Dublin and Portland, OR, Four Courts Press, 2003), 18–35. See also Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages*. *Conjunctions of Religion & Power in the Medieval Past* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003).

⁷⁵ Mercedes Borrero Fernández, "La mujer en la Edad Media. ¿Una historia de la marginalidad?, *Las mujeres y el mal*, ed. M. Palma y Eva Parra (Sevilla: Padilla, 2002), 65: "En las mujeres de la Edad Media no existe uniformidad, salvo, quizás, en un plano muy teórico, y esta uniformidad teórica refleja sólo unos estereotipos muy primarios creados por las bases ideológicas de esa civilización" (among medieval women we don't find uniformity, except, perhaps, on a very theoretical level, and this theoretical uniformity only reflects some stereotypes of the lowest kind created on the ideological basis of that society).

Chancellor of the University of Paris. As Barbara Newman observes, "Her labor pangs as a writer are to issue in transcendence and eternal memory, in a sublimation of maternity that proceeds from the same feminine Nature who gave her a female body in the first place."⁷⁶

Furthermore, throughout the centuries we find male writers who either idealized women or defended them against male aggression both within their own works and in public. Some of the greatest literary masterpieces from the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries are intimately predicated upon the deep love between men and women, both being members of the court. Both Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes, both Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach, both Andreas Capellanus and Juan Ruiz, both the *troubadours* and the poets of the *stil dolce nuovo*, both the Latin poets whose songs are collected in the *Carmina Burana* and the numerous Middle High German *Minnesänger* (love poets) whose texts are anthologized, for example, in the famous *Manessische Liederhandschrift*, testify, though in a myriad of approaches, how much courtly society relied upon the concept of love which found its profoundest expression in men's deep admiration, respect, but also fear and disgust of women.⁷⁷ In other words, public discourse on gender relationships was carried out within the universe of courtly literature. Here we find male writers idealizing courtly ladies, and also poets who harbored deep suspicion of powerful women. Here we come across female voices strongly defending women's right to accept or to reject a lover. And it is here where the dialectics of gender relationships receive their most eloquent literary expression.

This is not to ignore highly disturbing power struggles, obvious patriarchal structures, women's general disadvantages at the courts and in the political sphere because they were always treated as different, and forced to defend their outreach, their literary efforts, and their demands on political influence almost always all by themselves.⁷⁸ Similar to the Jewish population, medieval women were always relegated to the status of a minority despite the mostly balanced gender statistics. By the same token, however, we have bemoaned the supposedly entirely miserable position of medieval women within political, administrative,

⁷⁶ Barbara Newman, "Did Goddesses Empower Women?," 155; see also Prudence Allen, R.S.M., *The Concept of Woman*. Vol. II: *The Early Humanist Reformation 1250–1500* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 565–610.

⁷⁷ This finds its perhaps most vivid expression in the genre of women songs (*Frauenlieder*, *chansons de toile*) popular throughout the high Middle Ages. See, for example, *Frauenlieder des Mittelalters*. Zweisprachig. Übersetzt und herausgegeben von Ingrid Kasten (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1990); now see also *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, transl. and introd. Eglal Doss-Quinby, Joan Tasker Grimberty, Wendy Pfeffer, Elizabeth Aubrey (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁷⁸ See the by now classical study on this topic – at least within the Spanish-speaking world – by Maria-Milagros Rivera Garretas, *Textos y espacios de mujeres (Europa siglos iv–xv)* (Barcelona: Icaria, 1990).

theological, and military circles for just too long, and have neglected to nuance our perspectives by considering women's intellectual life within their own spheres. We need, in other words, to retrieve hitherto ignored literary, artistic, and chronicle sources which explicitly speak of, to, and about women in order to do justice to their actual role within society. Whether the female voice within the literary discourse actually undermined and challenged the patriarchal paradigm within medieval courtly society remains to be seen. But we can already observe that, despite a fairly difficult situation for women during the medieval past, they were neither abject pawns nor absolute power players.⁷⁹ Roberta L. Krueger, discussing Old French courtly romances, emphasizes, for instance, that "The female reader who projects herself into romance is often entrapped by her literary encounter. If she identifies with the feminine identity created by the text, she becomes an object of male desire or of exchange between men."⁸⁰ But she hastens to add, quite correctly: "the problematic women readers so often depicted in courtly fiction might be viewed as both inscribing and inviting historical women's possible resistance. . . . Fictional representations of women as readers and spectators may also portray women who question courtly conventions."

Many women were independent enough to go on extensive pilgrimages, at times even on their own, though mostly in groups and accompanied by one or several males. The dangers were numerous and real, whether these women were attacked by robbers or rapists, whether they wandered off their path and faced death by hunger and thirst, whether they were endangered by wild animals or inclement weather, but the number of female pilgrims was, after all, astounding.⁸¹ In the subsequent investigations I will discuss one of them in greater detail, Margery Kempe, because her interactions with the public, her journeys, and her search for mystical illumination powerfully translated into literary self-realization.

A most significant example of how much women, especially courtly ladies, were regarded as central to the public discourse at least since the twelfth century, can be found in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* (ca. 1210).⁸² In his famous excursus

⁷⁹ See the various contributions to: *Pawns or Players?*, ed. Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless. Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women (Dublin and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2003), especially the introduction, 7.

⁸⁰ Roberta L. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance*. Cambridge Studies in French, 43 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), xii.

⁸¹ Diana Webb, "Freedom of Movement? Women Travellers in the Middle Ages," *Pawns or Players*, 75–89. See also Marta González Vázquez, *Las mujeres de la Edad Media y el Camino de Santiago* (Santiago de Compostela: Xunta de Galicia, n.d. [1989 and 2000]); Albrecht Classen, "Die Mystikerin als peregrina. Margery Kempe: Reisende in corpore – Reisende in spiritu," *Studies in Spirituality* 5 (1995): 27–145.

⁸² Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*. Nach dem Text von Friedrich Ranke neu herausgegeben, ins Mittelhochdeutsche übersetzt, mit einem Stellenkommentar und einem Nachwort von Rüdiger Krohn. 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980).

in which he focuses on 'huote,' or control of the individual's honor and morality in public, the poet discusses the various perspectives on women since the time of *Genesis*, and reaches a conclusion at the end that deserves our full attention especially in the context of our discussion of gender as a matter of discourse.

Gottfried confirms that woman is the pinnacle of all creatures here on earth, but he uses an amorphous language with which he does not simply sing a praise of the female sex. On the contrary, the poet identifies women's accomplishments when their desire for honor triumphs over the physical conditions as the perfection of humanity (17986–991). However, Gottfried does not continue the ancient clerical tradition of condemning the temptation of the flesh because of its physical needs, as Bernard of St. Cluny, for example, had exemplified in his poem *De contemptus mundi*. Instead, he argues that both aspects, mind and body, need to be treated equally and fairly, particularly because both are fundamental for the human existence. He encourages women: "daz sî den beiden rehte tuo / und sehe ietwederm alsô zuo, / daz daz ander dâ bî / von ir iht versûmet sî" (17992–996; that she do justice to both and make sure that neither part be neglected because of the other).

Absolute attention to public honor would unfairly do injustice to the legitimate needs of the body (18000–002). In fact, a woman emerges as a role model for all people if she achieves this highest goal to embrace, without any discrimination, both joy/love and sorrow: "mit liebe und mit leide" (18004).⁸³ Obviously, Gottfried here translates the body and public honor into more abstract concepts, the former referring to the physical and individual needs, the latter referring to the spiritual and public expectations.

If woman can embrace and realize "mâze" (18010; moderation), then she would have accomplished the almost impossible: "Ezn ist al der dinge kein, / der ie diu sunne beschein, / sô rehte saelic sô daz wîp, / diu ir leben unde ir lîp / an die mâze verlât" (18015–019; there is nothing as glorious in the world upon which the sun shines as the woman who has handed over her life and her body to moderation). Although "mâze" seems to be almost elusive as an ideal, nevertheless the poet assumes that women are in a position to achieve this ultimate goal, and in this respect they assume a role model for men as well.

⁸³ See the fundamental study by Ingrid Hahn, "das lebende paradys. (Tristan 17858–18114)," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 92 (1963): 184–95; for a recent close reading, see Tomas Tomasek, *Die Utopie im 'Tristan' Gotfrids von Straßburg*. Hermaea, Germanistische Forschungen, Neue Folge, 49 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985), 181–83; the question of how much Gottfried here formulates an enormously invigorating praise of women and allows them to be treated as equal partners in the quest for the utopia of human happiness, however, is hardly considered here. The secondary literature on *Tristan* is vast and continues to grow at an astounding pace. See the journal *Tristania*, the latest volume, XXII, having appeared in 2003.

Gottfried does not address traditional didactic values for women, such as humility, modesty, chastity,⁸⁴ but rather presents an innovative ethical ideal of human life, best incorporated by his female protagonist, Isolde. Not surprisingly, the poet challenges those critics who continue to identify all women with evilness and associates them to a dangerous seductive force, inherited from their arch-mother, Eve. On the contrary, Gottfried advocates a concept of human life, especially realized by noble women, in which both the physical and the spiritual constitute essential parts of a harmonious whole. This in turn would make this person to be loved by the entire world (18024). By contrast, if women struggle against their own corporeality, hence against their sexuality and gender identity, they would lose this love altogether and undermine their value as members of the human race: "wer sol die minnen über daz? / diu selbe ir lîp unmaeret / und daz der werlt bewaeret" (18028–030; who would love her who hates her own body and shows this to the world?). The opposite, of course, easily also might be the case, as the poet emphasizes: the detestable woman who only pursues her physical desires, neglects the law of moderation, and who has, for instance, many lovers, would be rejected by most people in courtly society (18043–044).

Gottfried is most concerned with inner values and the kind of person who knows how to achieve peace with himself or herself without listening to the demands of immoderate, inconsistent, and material-oriented people: "Ein wîp, diu ir wîpheit / wider ir selber liebe treit / der werlde zuo gevalle, / die sol diu werlt alle / werden unde schoenen" (18051–055; a woman who loves/accepts her own femininity in order to be in unison with the world ought to be honored and praised by society). This also implies a new level of partnership and equality within marriage, and elevates the woman out of the realm of traditional misogyny and patriarchal thinking into a sphere where gender loses its divisive character and transforms into an element of simple distinction between two people within one unit.⁸⁵ In fact, true happiness ("lebende paradîs," 18066, living paradise) within marriage can be found if the female partner freely grants her love without any false limitations (18060–066). But according to Gottfried, Isolde is not the only woman who would be the source of love. Men only need to search long and hard to come across an ideal woman, another Isolde (18110–114), an experience which then would create a new source of absolute, almost divine, happiness for both of them.

This glorification of Isolde, almost like a new Madonna, does not reify her and move her out of the world of living things, as some critics might charge, especially since she does not serve simply as an instrument through which Tristan might

⁸⁴ These were addressed by many contemporary writers, such as Thomasin von Zerklare, Hugo von Trimberg or Ulrich von Liechtenstein, see Susanne Barth, *Jungfrauenzucht*.

⁸⁵ Tomas Tomasek, *Die Utopie*, 185.

gain his personal happiness. In fact, she proves to be the perfect example of how all people ought to behave, neither denying the basic needs of their bodies, or their self, nor rejecting the social demands on her personality and honor: “weiz got si müezen alle / stigen in ir werdekeit / mit micheler arbeit” (18006–008; by God, they will all grow in personal honor when they strive hard).

Very deliberately and resolutely, Gottfried frees women from the ancient stereotype of being Eve’s daughters, of being helplessly subject to lustfulness and immoderation, and victims of their own physicality (flesh), insofar as they gain recognition in *Tristan* simply by assuming their own responsibility, by embracing their individuality, and by establishing the most important balance between body and spirit.⁸⁶ The same ideal also ought to be achieved by men, and Tristan proves to be as much challenged by the narrator’s projection of his ideals as his beloved is. Nevertheless, as I will demonstrate later, Gottfried clearly favors Isolde over Tristan, and he unequivocally projects her as the true protagonist in the romance, at least from the time on when she has to undergo the ordeal with the hot-red iron.⁸⁷ In the “huote”-excursus, to be sure, Isolde, and with her all noble, honorable women, is freed from the ancient accusation of following Eve’s footsteps and being a victim of her own corporeality. As the narrator emphasizes, Isolde, who represents the new rose in paradise, displays no thorns, shows no any anger, and knows how to be herself in a most loving manner, giving freely of her “triuwe unde minne” (18086; loyalty and love).

In other words, Gottfried specifically argues that Isolde, the ideal female character, has emerged as a role model for all people, including all men, and deserves greatest respect for the absolute harmony in her self, in her relationship with society, and in her love for Tristan, the catalyst for her own personal development.⁸⁸ The opposite strategy can also be observed in medieval courtly poetry, especially when male poets utilize the female voice, such as in Neidhart’s songs, where the obvious intention is not to ridicule women, but to criticize the

⁸⁶ Marion Mälzer, *Die Isolde-Gestalten in den mittelalterlichen deutschen Tristan-Dichtungen: Ein Beitrag zum diachronischen Wandel*. Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1991), 221–23. For political perspectives on Isolde the mother and Isolde the daughter, see Albrecht Classen, “Matriarchy versus Patriarchy: The Role of the Irish Queen Isolde in Gottfried von Straßburg’s ‘Tristan’,” *Neophilologus* 73 (1989): 77–89.

⁸⁷ Albrecht Classen, “Female Agency and Power in Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan*: The Irish Queen Isolde: New Perspectives,” *Tristania* 23 (2005): 39–60.

⁸⁸ This observation, however, also needs to be seen in light of Gottfried’s anthropological perspective according to which the ideal woman discards her female character and assumes a male nature: “swâ sô daz wîp ir wîpheit / unde ir herze von ir leit / und herzet sich mit manne, / dâ honiget diu tanne” (17979–982; when woman sheds her femininity and her female heart, and loves the man, then the pine tree will produce honey). Yet the subsequent section illustrates that the poet truly talks about the individual character development irrespective of the gender, arguing for the establishment of an inner balance between body and honor, or between the individual and the social aspect.

ethical and moral decline of chivalry by projecting satirical images of members of the peasant class. In those cases we easily detect unmitigated misogyny, unmistakable reification of woman as a sexual object, and even woman's demonization because of her alleged nymphomaniac weakness.⁸⁹ The other tendency pertains to the world of religious women who are seen as the true representatives of the Virgin Mary and thus as the earthly redeemers of Eve.

To expand on this context we also ought to refer to the vast corpus of mystical literature which might be dominated by medieval women writers, but suffice here to remind ourselves of the highly complex interaction of voices between the mystic and the Godhead, subsequently also between the mystic and her confessor, and finally between the mystic and her public audience. In other words, irrespective of the individual cases in medieval literature, it always proves to be extremely difficult to identify the one voice all by itself, whereas the nature of gender debates always requires the consideration of polarities, tensions, and differences.⁹⁰

The subsequent collection of articles, most of them at first developed on their own and for separate occasions as conference papers, but subsequently considerably expanded and revised and now hopefully forming harmonious parts of a global concept, pursues the argument that this particular female space within the medieval world can also be explored through a careful investigation of literary and non-fictional texts where women speak up both as the actual authors and as their protagonists.⁹¹ Although the present introduction offers a sweeping overview of the key elements in the theoretical approach to gender discourse, I will revisit and reexamine these fundamental issues in each chapter once again, which will allow me to deepen and widen the complex sweep concerning women's voices, men's responses, the interchange between both groups, and to grasp the dialogic, often polyphonic communication extending far beyond the simple division between the two genders. Many women enjoyed tremendous and far-reaching influence and respect, despite the vehement misogyny and the blatant patriarchy which dominated medieval society—at least within the official sphere of the courts,

⁸⁹ Jan-Dirk Müller, "Männliche Stimme – weibliche Stimme in Neidharts Sommerliedern," id., *Minnesang und Literaturtheorie*, 233–44 (orig. 2001).

⁹⁰ Angela Muñoz Fernández, *Mujer y experiencia religiosa en el marco de la santidad medieval*. Colección Laya, 2 (Madrid: Asociación Cultural Al-Mudayna, 1988), 119–20: "Como se puede ver, la Virgen María es merecedora por sí misma de un estudio particular fecundo en conclusiones ya que la universal proyección de su imagen en todos los estratos del cuerpo social se ha interpretado como una promoción de la consideración femenina dentro de la sociedad" (As we can see, the Virgin Maria deserves to be studied on her own merits, especially in light of the conclusion that the universal projection of her image in all strata of the social body can be interpreted as a promotion of how women are regarded within society).

⁹¹ *Women as Protagonists*, ed. Albrecht Classen; see now Carlyn Dinshaw and David Wallace, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

knighthood, the Church, and the scholars. Both male writers and their female counterparts reflected this fascinating situation either by allowing female characters to speak up and to defend their own positions, or by transgressing traditional literary genres and resorting to marginal or more specialized textual genres, such as memoirs, travelogues, cookbooks, religious poems, and scientific texts.⁹²

As in so many cases, everything depends on the perspective, whether we turn to female convents or to the intimate domain of marriage, whether we consider queens who were in charge of the government during their husband's absence or sometimes after his death, or to urban women who succeeded in establishing their own business and resolutely rejected attempts by male family members and/or neighbors, if not the city council or the guild, to impose their restrictive rules on them.

We would not face any difficulty in detecting numerous cases where the very opposite was the case, that is, absolute rule by men, whether in the convent (supervision by an abbot and the confessor) or in the family, whether in the workshop or in the city hall, whether at court or on the farm. Nevertheless, the polarity of these perspectives does not allow us to gain a true understanding of the discourse between the two genders, although it has been the dominant viewpoint for a long time among scholars and the public alike.⁹³ This volume combines articles most of which were originally written as conference presentations addressing this very issue, and subsequently extensively elaborated, but they all support each other in one way or the other, being interlaced by the common theme focused on the gender discourse, the power struggle between the genders, and the surprising observation that women in the Middle Ages were not simply chattel, that they had a voice of their own, and knew how to balance male power through numerous strategies, both open and subtle. Although the approaches that I will pursue vary considerably, they have one important denominator in common: in each chapter I argue that medieval women (writers) had space available for

⁹² Cf. Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex*, 1997.

⁹³ See, for example, the studies collected in *Liebe – Ehe – Ehebruch in der Literatur des Mittelalters*, ed. Xenja von Ertzdorff and Marianne Wynn. Beiträge zur deutschen Philologie, 58 (Giessen: Wilhelm Schmitz, 1984); the various contributors to *Las sabias mujeres: Educación, saber y autoría (siglos III–XVII)*, ed. María del Mar Graña Cid. Colección Laya, 13 (Madrid: A.C. Al-Mudayna, 1994), nicely illustrate the extent to which medieval women had access to education. In *Frauen Literatur Geschichte: Schreibende Frauen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* Hiltrud Gnüg und Renate Möhrmann. 2nd, completely rev. ed. (1985; Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), the editors assume, as their basic premise, that Virginia Woolf's image of the "creaking door," which signaled the arrival of other family members in a living room or some other place and forced the writing woman to hide her text, would be representative of the entire history of women's literature (Introduction), but the situation in the Middle Ages was very different, at least much more complicated, or, to use the key term for the entire study, much more 'discursive.'

themselves; that they were able to fill this space with their own words; and that they knew very well how to utilize a wide variety of genres as literary tools in their effort at self-realization. This applies both to such self-assertive authors as Marie de France and Christine de Pizan and to most mystical writers, such as Hildegard von Bingen, Mechthild von Magdeburg, Hadewijch, and Marguerite Porete (Porette), whose major concerns were directed at self-effacement to make room for the Godhead. But their apophatic discourse catapulted them subsequently out of their marginality into the center of the exchange with the Godhead, thereby entirely reversing the traditional concept of authorship and of a writer's status.⁹⁴ Mechthild von Magdeburg reports, for instance, how God explains his choice of her as His mouthpiece: "Wherever I bestowed special favors, / I always sought out the lowest, most insignificant, and most unknown place for them. / . . . / It is a great honor for me . . . / That the unlearned mouth, aided by my Holy Spirit, teaches the learned tongue."⁹⁵

The spectrum of writers dealt with in the subsequent articles extends from Hildegard von Bingen to Marie de France, from Margery Kempe to a late-medieval/early-modern German author of a famous cookbook, Anna Weckerin. But there are also discussions of how violence against women was treated by numerous writers throughout the Middle Ages, both male and female. Although many authors, especially those who composed *fabliaux* and similar genres—including the *Decameron* by Boccaccio, the *maeren* by Heinrich Kaufringer, and the *Heptaméron* by Marguerite de Navarre—present a number of ghastly cases of domestic violence, violence as such is regularly condemned and treated as a serious danger for the well-being of the entire society. Violence within the domestic sphere could also affect husbands, and some poets certainly dealt with this problem as well, offering criticism and formulating severe warnings against the perpetrators.

When domestic violence against women is condoned and even finds approval among male writers, then we are normally dealing with comic, erotic, often also pornographic literature.⁹⁶ This kind of violence and its narrative treatment seem to be surprisingly similar to those phenomena that likewise characterize our modern society. In this sense, my discussion of domestic violence (mostly in

⁹⁴ Jennifer Summit, "Women and Authorship," *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women Writing*, 91–108, here 95.

⁹⁵ Mechthild von Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, transl. and introd. Frank Tobin. Preface by Margot Schmidt (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998), Book II, ch. 26, here p. 97.

⁹⁶ For a thorough discussion of one (but only one!) perspective, see Vasvári, Louise O., "'Buon cavallo e mal cavallo vuole sprone, e buona femina e mala femina vuol bastone': Medieval Cultural Fictions of Wife Battering," *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early-Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 278 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 313–36.

medieval German literature) serves to sensitize us to the fact that such scenes were also included in courtly and non-courtly texts during that time, and that male writers mostly voiced severe criticism of women's mistreatment and repeatedly predicated their tales or romances on this problem—perhaps as a teaching tool. In this sense I would disagree with Marilyn Migiel in her criticism of Boccaccio's *Decameron* “that violence against women emerges when the very possibility of women's empowerment does. The stories of the *Decameron* imply that if women gain power, their power must remain limited, by violent means if need be.”⁹⁷ Migiel mentions, for instance, the poor scholar who severely suffers from life-threatening mistreatment at the hand of his beloved widow, but she seems to accept this form of violence as fair retribution, whereas the man's violence in response to her is severely condemned. The real emphasis, however, rests on the proper relationship between men and women, and on the warning against wrong behavior, irrespective of the gender roles. This also applies to the most notorious tale in the *Decameron*, 9.9, where an extreme form of violence is exerted against the wives, but the narrative still does not condone violence. Instead, as Migiel correctly underscores, “This is a story about a misguided interpretation of Solomon's advice; it reveals the perpetrators of violence against women to be indiscriminate readers and thinkers.”⁹⁸

Intriguingly, literary analysis can take us a considerable step further in a critical assessment of women's power position within their own society during the Middle Ages and the early modern age. Insofar as Boccaccio basically gives more credit to women than to men, he highlights the need for communication between men and women and invites his audience to reflect upon the meaning of violence and its dangers for the community at large, an issue most medieval poets were deeply concerned with.⁹⁹

A careful reading of a variety of medieval narratives, written by male and female authors, both from the early and the late Middle Ages, indicates the extent to which our modern understanding of medieval women's lives and roles are strangely blurred by mythical concepts, often determined by nineteenth-century notions of women's suffering and subjugation during the preceding centuries. Difficult conditions for women during the age of the Baroque and the Enlightenment, or the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, cannot be simply adduced as evidence for the actual situation for women in the Middle Ages. Negative examples of women's mistreatment can always and easily be matched by positive examples, and in most cases those writers who focus on

⁹⁷ Marilyn Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 149.

⁹⁸ Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron*, 155–56.

⁹⁹ Albrecht Classen, *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung*, 2002.

violent behavior against women can be identified as the sharpest critics of the patriarchal system. In "Violence to Women, Women's Rights, and Their Defenders in Medieval German Literature" I try to deconstruct a number of modern myths about medieval women, and offer a critical reading of Hrotsvith of Gandersheim's presentation of outstanding female characters in her dramas and religious narratives. I will also investigate the idealization of Enite in Hartmann of Aue's *Erec*, and the thematization of suffering women in Heinrich Kaufringer's fifteenth-century tales, among others.

In my study of Margery Kempe's *Book* I suggest that literary quality does not depend only on the ability to express oneself in an eloquent and sophisticated manner and to project a fictional world, but also on the flexible command of various genres. In this respect, Margery proves to be an amazingly skillful writer because she demonstrates throughout her *Book* how easily she could transfer from one type of literary discourse to another. This approach seems to lend itself particularly well for further investigations of mystical literature, especially of those texts composed by female authors. The application of a variety of genres also indicates the ease with which Margery could operate within the literary tradition that she evokes not through the integration of concrete quotes or paraphrases of learned treatises, but instead through the intriguing exchange of modes of speech, literary and non-literary styles, compositional elements, and other narrative techniques and strategies.

This approach is complemented by a study of fourteenth-century Southwest-German Dominican *Sisterbooks* in which whole communities of nuns endeavored to formulate their own mystical experiences or to partake in those of their fellow-sisters. Whereas here the generic approach in all contributions seems to be similar, if not identical most of the time, the collective of writers emerges as one the most fascinating phenomena in late-medieval literature. Although we have learned to identify the medieval convent as a center of education, study, and research, and also of the arts, not to mention a place of religious practice, its primary goal, these *Sisterbooks* beautifully illustrate the extent to which whole groups of monastic women could find access to the literary voice by means of individual, but ultimately communally shared mystical experiences. This corpus of texts strongly suggests that medieval convents deserve to be studied much more closely than before as the intellectual framework for lively, spiritual, productive, and self-exploratory exchanges realized by means of the written word.¹⁰⁰ As Anne Winston-Allen now observes, "If women more than men were drawn to trances,

¹⁰⁰ Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists. The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997); Susan Martik, *Malen, Schreiben und Beten: Die spätmittelalterliche Handschriftenproduktion im Doppelkloster Engelberg* (Zurich: Zurich InterPublishers, 2002).

visions, and radical asceticism—or, at least, to depicting them in their writing—it may have been because these phenomena opened avenues of influence that were not otherwise available to them. Indeed, visionary phenomena and radical asceticism could elevate female mystics even above priests by placing them in direct relationship with God.”¹⁰¹

Significantly, male courtly poets also recognized the profound relevance of gender discourse and more often than not gave credit to their female protagonists. Both in the case of Hartmann von Aue’s *Erec* and in Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan*—in each Middle High German text this aspect is considerably more pronounced than in their Old French sources—the central female character each time emerges as absolutely essential for the male hero’s personal development who ultimately realizes, as does his wife, that only mutual respect and public recognition of the partner guarantees happiness for the individual and for society at large. Erec grows into full adulthood and maturity only after he has almost lost and then regained Enite, and their intellectual and emotional development intimately depends, as both realize after their life-threatening experiences in the second part of the romance, on their ability to find to each other, to accept each other, and to embrace each other as equal partners in marriage.

Isolde, on the other hand, for a long time seems to be only Tristan’s student in matters of love and constantly requires his advice when conflicts with her husband, King Marke, emerge. But ultimately, when the situation for both lovers grows desperate and basically becomes impossible, Tristan can no longer grow spiritually, and proves to be an almost statuesque and passive figure, whereas Isolde emerges as the true heroine, or as the veritable member of the community of the noble heart. She is the one who woefully but courageously accepts her destiny at the side of the unbeloved husband, without enjoying the support of Tristan, and she is given the highest credit by the poet for her deep sense of love and pain. Tristan, on the other hand, seems to get confused by the intricate situation of this love relationship. Once he has departed, his mind gets diverted and his heart seems to be divided, unable to accept fully and truly the dialectics of courtly love, predicated on the dialectics of happiness and sorrow. In this sense, both Hartmann and Gottfried project greatly impressive images of their female protagonists and elevate them to the highest possible position within the world of love (*Tristan*) and marriage (*Erec*).

Epistemologically speaking, mysticism proved to be the ultimate challenge for the human creature in the exploration of the ‘Other.’ One could demonstrate this

¹⁰¹ Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, 207–08. She identifies these women’s turn to visionary experience—if that is what we might call it, and not the other way around—as a “route to speech. Generally, the social groups affected by a loss of status tend to be the most conscious of alternative modes of expression, linguistic registers, and the power of language” (208).

in the case of many different authors, but here I focus on Hildegard von Bingen who was one of the first, and also one of the most powerful prophetic writers of her time. Her *Scivias*, and many of her other texts, contain most astounding images of the Godhead and describe in fascinating detail how the individual—the mystic Hildegard—was confronted with and welcomed by the totally ‘Other’ through a spiritual revelation. The study of her spiritual accomplishments in comparison with the literary successes by Marie de France is included here because it illustrates once again how much mystically influenced women were empowered by their visions to come forward and to relate their experiences to their audiences. These experiences, in turn, provided the basis for political, social, at times even military influence (as in the case of Catherine of Siena, Bridget of Sweden, and Joan of Arc whom I do not discuss in particular here), and made it possible for women such as Hildegard and Marie to transgress perceived or real power barriers established by the male authorities between female writers and the written word.

Hildegard von Bingen—perhaps better identified as a prophetic author than a mystic—powerfully defended women’s positions and perspectives as much as her secular contemporary Marie de France. However, neither woman harbored a particular ‘feminist’ agenda and did not radically insist on women’s rights in aggressive opposition to men at large, as some of their modern-day sisters have done. Instead, through the composition of their texts, by claiming access to the written word, and by insisting on their own right to address the public either as a poet or a teacher and preacher, both Hildegard and Marie demonstrated how much women, at least since the twelfth century, could also enjoy the status of widely recognized and admired authors.

Whereas Hildegard drew the authority for her writings from her prophetic visions and her status as leader of her convent of Rupertsberg near Bingen, Marie consciously referred to the classical literature and also to her oral Breton sources to legitimate her own creative productivity. In her *Lais* Marie taught fundamental lessons about love, marriage, loyalty, honor, and idealism, and in her *Fables* she provided profound insights into morality, ethics, the political system, and the principal rules of social cohabitation. Hildegard, on the other hand, revealed her religious visions, related her mystical experiences, preached to people about the divinity and the proper quest for the Godhead, and also offered amazing explanations about the human body, the causes of sickness, sexuality, and medicine.

Surprisingly, although neither woman achieved any major political rank or influence on the rulers of their time, they both boldly assumed a highly esteemed, though not always uncontested position within their society—especially in Hildegard’s case—thereby dispelling a favorite modern myth about medieval

women's allegedly miserable life conditions, subjugation, muteness, and lack of education.

We can also find an additional example from the world of heroic poetry. By the way how the figure of Queen Helche, wife of the Hunnish ruler Attila, in the anonymous heroic epic *Dietrichs Flucht* (second half of the thirteenth century), among many others in medieval German literature, is portrayed, we can be certain that male poets had little hesitation to project the most powerful queens in their texts, queens who determined the destiny of their country and the lives of the male heroes through their political decisions, their material wealth, and their resolution in defending the good cause against treachery, disloyalty, and betrayal.¹⁰²

Quite a similar situation emerges in the memoirs of the fifteenth-century Helene Kottannerin, who comparably to the Andalusian author Leonor López de Córdoba, resorted to the written word to come to terms with her own life, and to reflect upon the political situation of her time in which she was intimately involved as the chambermaid of the Hungarian queen. Although seemingly composing nothing but a chronicle account, Helene obviously succeeded in transcending the mundane description of the difficult events when the Hungarian nobles tried to force the widowed Queen Elizabeth to marry the Polish king, although she was pregnant with her deceased husband's child and trusted that the latter would eventually assume the Hungarian throne. Helene's most dramatic relation of how she stole the Hungarian crown and thus assisted Elizabeth in triumphing over her opponents, then her personal reflections, and her intriguingly subjective reading of events and the individual power players indeed confirm that here we are dealing with a literary text as well. These *Denkwürdigkeiten* easily prove to be considerably more than just a factual account; instead Helene transforms them into a document of noteworthy literary quality.

Quite another case, outside the scope of our study, though highly illustrative for our overall argument, proves to be the French chronicle by the nun and later Abbess Jeanne de Jussie (1503–1561) who discussed the introduction of the Protestant Reformation in Geneva and many other political matters affecting her convent and the Catholic Church at large. Being highly critical of the Reformation, she set down to compose her chronicle in 1532 and completed it in 1545 in Annecy, covering the years 1526 to 1535, during the governance of the Abbess Pernette de Montluel de Châteaufort. This is "only" a chronicle, but it reflects the enormous degree to which clerically trained women, at least at the end of the Middle Ages, were in a position to join the public discourse and to claim their stake in such a

¹⁰² *Dietrichs Flucht*. Textgeschichtliche Ausgabe Elisabeth Lienert and Gertrud Beck. Texte und Studien zur mittelhochdeutschen Heldenepik, 1 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003), 4667, 4682, 4824, et passim. Helche's role gains even more preponderance in other heroic epics, such as *Rabenschlacht*.

significant written work, whether they resorted to the vernacular or to Latin.¹⁰³ There is no doubt that Jeanne de Jussie was only one of many at her time, especially as convents were of greatest importance for women as centers of learning and study.

Once again, we certainly deal with nothing but a chronicle, but within the spectrum of discourses, this proves to be critical for our new approach to women's writing as well since we will observe that women resorted to many different genres to express themselves, whether they intended to create literary or non-literary texts. Other genres preferred by women writers would be letters, mystical accounts, instructional texts, including herbals and cookbooks, whereas fictional texts in the traditional sense of the word were much less written by women, as far as we can tell today.¹⁰⁴

As different as these various female authors, their perceptions, insights, and language turn out to be, and as unusual perhaps the sometimes almost exorbitant praise of female characters by male authors might seem to us today, they demonstrate an enormously diversified range of voices in public discourse on gender throughout the Middle Ages. The subsequent chapters, though from a variety of perspectives, shed new light on many different approaches to the gender issue and demonstrate that medieval women enjoyed considerable influence on the creation of and concrete access to the literary word.

Whereas most medieval male writers expressed some form of misogyny, we also discover some among them who energetically defended women against numerous charges against them. The paradox of literary discourse with and about women clearly signals that traditional assumptions about male dominance of medieval literature and the alleged absence of female writers must be discarded. While a wealth of new scholarship produced over the last two decades easily confirms this observation, many desiderata remain, especially with respect to late-medieval German women writers, and also with respect to non-fictional writers. The rediscovery of medieval female voices not only considerably widens our perspectives and deepens our understanding of a past age, but it also forces us to reconsider and redefine the basic concepts of what we mean by 'author,' 'poet,'

¹⁰³ Jeanne de Jussie, *Kleine Chronik: Bericht einer Nonne über die Anfänge der Reformation in Genf*, transl. and ed. Helmut Feld. Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für europäische Geschichte Mainz. Abteilung abendländische Religionsgeschichte, 40 (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1996).

¹⁰⁴ Even this perspective can no longer be fully maintained, see Albrecht Classen, *Late-Medieval German Women's Poetry: Secular and Religious Songs*. Library of Medieval Women (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2004); cf. *Medieval Woman's Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches*, ed. Anne L. Klinck and Ann Marie Rasmussen. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

and 'literature.' In this sense, our study of medieval women writers leads to many different implications intimately connected with our broad field of investigation, the humanities, based on the written word. This should not come as a surprise, however, since most human activities are predicated on the fundamental binary opposition of male and female, here disregarding the many curious cases of inter- and transsexual identities. In this sense we would entirely misread medieval culture if we left out at least one half of it, the world of women. Not only were they present most of the time, but they were also highly vocal and knew how to express themselves and how to come to terms with their individual needs and desires. Intriguingly, this can now be confirmed, as the following chapters will demonstrate, in the case of medieval and early-modern German, and, in a few cases, English, Latin, and Anglo-Norman, literature.

As the collective of women's voices studied here clearly indicates, the paradigm of medieval culture as a world in which women were entirely subjugated and made into pawns at the hands of their male contemporaries requires considerable adjustment, modification, if not complete rejection, as a growing body of parallel research in various medieval languages and literary genres, not to speak of other disciplines (art history, music history, history, etc.) indicates.¹⁰⁵ This is not say that medieval women enjoyed full equality, respect, and admiration—both this and the very opposite would be generalizations that could not be upheld against thorough analysis. The laws of the Church and the secular authorities continued to treat them as second-class citizens, and the public opinion, again determined by male voices, identified women as the source of all evil.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, as the various approaches to this topic contained in this volume demonstrate, opposition to this stereotypical viewpoint was loud and clear. There was much public discourse throughout the high and late Middle Ages representing a picture of men and women interacting with each other, offering challenges, opportunities, responses, support, and also deep respect.

¹⁰⁵ The contributors to *Women and Medieval Epic: Gender, Genre, and the Limits of Epic Masculinity*, ed. Sara S. Poor and Jana K. Schulman. The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave, 2006), confirm this observation by analyzing the role assumed by the female figures in a wide range of medieval epic poems next to, if not sometimes above, the male protagonists.

¹⁰⁶ Eva Parra Membrives, "Criminalidad y perfidia femenina. El mal y la mujer en autores y autoras del medioevo alemán," *Las mujeres y el mal*, 187–207, demonstrates, however, that numerous medieval German women writers insisted on women's innocence and actual victimization at the hand of men. She concludes, with tongue-in-cheek, 207: "Quizá, si una mujer hubiera escrito la *Biblia*, hubiéramos sabido que, en realidad, fue Adán quien deseó, tentado por la serpiente, morder la manzana, pero acusó a la inapetente Eva de ello, condenándola como culpable para toda la eternidad" (Maybe, if a woman had written the Bible, we would have known that in reality it was Adam, tempted by the snake, to pick the apple, but he accused innocent Eva for it, condemning her for all eternity as the culpable).

I will rely on a fairly flexible definition of literature and at times resort to a broad concept of text production and narratives, but this will also free us from traditional categories developed by literary historians that are almost entirely oriented toward the social and cultural conditions in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries which in turn were predicated on the cult of the genius and the purely creative, innovative, that is, fictional, writer.¹⁰⁷ The gender discourse has much to do with the power over the word, and by freeing ourselves from these traditional concepts of the literary text we gain access to many heretofore forgotten or ignored women writers, and we can also realize how much the gender discourse took place both at the courts (courtly romances) and in convents, both in the urban spaces (plays) and on travel routes (verse narratives), both in public and in private at many different social levels.¹⁰⁸ Intriguingly, this discourse in the Middle Ages also involved some of the best male writers who often emerge as strong defenders of women's causes.¹⁰⁹ In order to come to terms with these sometimes even dialectic aspects within the gender discourse, I will offer additional and further discussions of the theoretical underpinnings concerning the gender discourse in each of the following chapters.

I would like to dedicate this book to the steadfast and loving companion in my life, my wife and best friend, Carolyn.

¹⁰⁷ See also my study "Literary or Not? The Fictionality Debate in Autobiographical Writings by a Fifteenth-Century German Woman Writer," 2006.

¹⁰⁸ The association of literary genres with social classes and sites cannot be really upheld and only serves as a reflection of where a majority of such texts were performed.

¹⁰⁹ Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women*; from a considerably more black-and-white perspective, see Katharina Fietze, *Spiegel der Vernunft: Theorien zum Menschsein der Frau in der Anthropologie des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna, and Zurich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1991). See now *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1988).

Chapter One

Violence to Women, Women's Rights, and Their Defenders in Medieval German Literature¹

I. Fact or Fiction, History or Myth?

Let us revisit some of the key aspects explored in the introduction, deepen our understanding of the theoretical and pragmatic aspects, and apply them to specific cases in medieval German literature. One of the common notions (myths?) about women in the Middle Ages, which used to be shared both by the general public and scholarship alike, pertains to their social, political, military, and economic position below men within a patriarchal system. According to this view, women were considered either as chattel, malleable objects in the hand of their fathers, husbands, brothers, and other male relatives, or as venerable, god-like creatures, that is, either as Eve or as Mary, both in the religious and courtly-erotic context. Another wide-spread opinion relates to women's deplorable experience of violence at the hand of their husbands and fathers because early-medieval society, then also the Church, had given husbands the absolute right to physical punishment, the so-called *munt* in Middle High German.² Moreover, medieval women had, as we can read in countless handbooks and lexica, allegedly few opportunities in medieval society to express themselves, and they had only two significant options available to them in life, either to enter a convent or to marry, to be bride of Christ or to be a wife in real life. If women ascended to the royal throne, then it was only as their husband's consorts, entirely dependent on his

¹ I would like to express my thanks to my dear colleague and friend, Professor Karen K. Jambeck, Western Connecticut State University, for kindly reading this chapter, offering most welcome constructive criticism.

² For a much more complex perspective, see *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler, Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1988), for practical examples, however, of how much wives were suppressed during the Middle Ages, see Joachim Bumke, *Höfische Kultur. Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), vol. 2, 465–66.

good-will, and that of his barons, and if urban women managed to establish their own workshops within a city, then they were still subject to severe control mechanisms set up by the guilds.

Correspondingly, the Middle Ages were the “Dark Ages” for women’s history,³ and the long-term struggle for women’s liberation began only after that period.⁴ Women’s subjugation under men’s control is then commonly identified with the wide-spread witch-craze which resulted in sweeping persecutions and executions of hundreds of thousand of innocent female victims all over Europe far into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It hardly needs to be pointed out that the witch-craze had fairly little to do with the Middle Ages; instead it was a specific phenomenon of the early-modern age with the rise of modern state characterized by its centralized administration and legal system. But for modern myth-making, the most horrible treatment of women—as witches—proves to be convenient and facilitates the creation of a simple black-and-white perspective regarding women’s past; this also in conformity with the common notion of history as a constantly progressive process according to which we can only look back today and shudder about the barbaric and brutal treatment of women in the past.⁵

If women, in their role as nuns, turned to writing, and reflected upon their mystical experiences, these could be explained as outlets of hysterical passions, and for a long time such works did not gain the same status as men’s theological writing characterized by logical thinking and rationality, normally acquired through a university education, which was systematically denied to women.⁶ By the same token, if literary historians are hard pressed, they would ‘happily’ admit that we know of no female writer who accomplished anything similar to the grand poetry of their male contemporaries, such as Chrétien de Troyes, Hartmann von Aue, Gottfried von Straßburg, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Dante Alighieri, Giovanni Boccaccio, Francesco Petrarch, and Geoffrey Chaucer. The poetry by the *troubairitz*, the *Lais* by Marie de France, and the treatises and allegorical narratives

³ For a sensitive and comprehensive treatment of the mythical notion of the ‘Dark Ages,’ see Lucie Varga, *Das Schlagwort vom “finsternen Mittelalter”*. Veröffentlichungen des Seminars für Wirtschafts- und Kulturgeschichte an der Universität Wien, 8 (Baden, Vienna, et al.: Rudolf M. Rohrer, 1932).

⁴ This is poignantly expressed by Barbara Becker-Cantarino’s seminal study, *Der lange Weg zur Mündigkeit. Frau und Literatur (1500–1800)* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987). Unfortunately, Becker-Cantarino begins her analysis only with the late Middle Ages and the age of the Reformation. In terms of the history of women’s literature, however, these historical demarcations do not always make much sense since social, economic, and political structures relevant for medieval women’s lives continued far into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

⁵ See the excellent critical review of feminism and gender studies within the academic context and with a focus on Medieval Studies by Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), esp. 19–29 and 128–52.

⁶ For a thorough critique of this perspective, and for a detailed investigation of women’s convent literature, see my chapter on the *Sisterbooks*.

by Christine de Pizan would represent exceptions to the rule. The same would apply to the powerful visionary, teacher, preacher, and leader of her convent, Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179) who, though highly influential and admired by many of her contemporaries for her mystical visions and scientific knowledge, was seemingly a marginal phenomenon and did not significantly alter the overall situation of women. In short, medieval society was, according to these general opinions, fundamentally a patriarchal society in which men ruled and women obeyed. If we hear of women speaking up, such female voices can be assumed as to be the products of male writers, such as in the *chansons de toiles*, or women's songs, in Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale* or in his *The Wife of Bath's Tale*.⁷

Are we talking about historical facts or medieval myths? Might medieval women have had a sonorous voice after all, or were they allowed to play only a small trumpet, as Hildegard von Bingen dialectically formulates in one of her mystical accounts?⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum already had warned us to be wary about women's depiction by male writers: "the stories men liked to tell about women reflected not so much what women did as what men admired or abhorred. . . . It is crucial not to take as women's own self-image the sentimentalizing or the castigating of the female in which medieval men indulged."⁹ Intriguingly, if we examine the political, economic, and even military records, we observe many different conditions for women, depending on their social class, their individual abilities, the cultural context, and so forth.¹⁰ Nevertheless popular and even scholarly notions about medieval women have continued to follow many of these stereotypical images outlined above and now have also made their way into the *World Wide Web* which sometimes proves to be more detrimental to the academic study of the Middle Ages than beneficial to its cause.¹¹

To deconstruct quickly just a few of the gross misunderstandings about women in the Middle Ages, the witch-craze, as mentioned above, did not come into full

⁷ *Medieval Woman's Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches*, ed. Ann Lingard Klinck and Ann Marie Rasmussen. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); *Frauenlieder des Mittelalters*. Zweisprachig, ed. and trans. Ingrid Kasten (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1990).

⁸ Margaret Wade Labarge, *Women in Medieval Life. A Small Sound of the Trumpet* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986), 20–23, 100–02, 104, et passim.

⁹ Carolyn Walker Bynum, "Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages," *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt, Bernard McGinn, and John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 121–39; here 136.

¹⁰ Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts*. Women of Letters (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), offers one of the best investigation of women's actual power base and range of influence in the Middle Ages. See also *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

¹¹ See, for example, http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/british_social_history/73685 (last accessed on Feb. 23, 2007).

effect until the end of the fifteenth century and is much more closely related to the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation than to the medieval Church, not to mention the emergence of the early-modern state with its interest in flexing its juridical muscles particularly against the innocent victims decried as witches.¹² We know of many exceedingly powerful queens, duchesses, and other aristocratic women who either ruled all by themselves or enjoyed extensive freedom in exerting their own power along with their husband.¹³ In the world of urban life, craftsmanship was not exclusively controlled by men, rather there were many women working in the textile industry, as cobblers, goldsmiths, merchants, apothecaries, and even as bankers, nurses, and doctors.¹⁴ Albeit

¹² H. R. Trevor-Roper, *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change. The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, and Other Essays*. Harper Torchbooks, 1416 (New York: Harper & Row, 1967; 1969); Gerhild Scholz Williams, *Defining Dominion: the Discourses of Magic and Witchcraft in Early Modern France and Germany*. Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Civilization (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Peter Dinzelbacher, *Heilige oder Hexen? Schicksale auffälliger Frauen in Mittelalter und Frühneuzeit* (Zürich: Artemis, 1995); Britta Gehm, *Hexenverfolgung im Hochstift Bamberg und das Eingreifen des Reichshofrates zu ihrer Beendigung*. Rechtsgeschichte und Zivilisationsprozess, 3 (Hildesheim: Olms, 2000); Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages*. Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 225–319, convincingly demonstrates that male writers increasingly demonized women's spiritual, ecstatic, and transgressive experiences and dramatically argued in favor of exorcism in most cases of religious enrapture. Whereas medieval writers still tended to accept the possibility of divine inspiration, in the late Middle Ages the belief in mystical experiences experienced a radical decline and was effectively replaced by a hostile attitude toward women, logically leading to the witchcraze. For the role of the early-modern state in the witchcraze, see Ketzer, *Zauberer, Hexen: Die Anfänge der europäischen Hexenverfolgungen*, ed. Andreas Blauert. Edition Suhrkamp, 1577 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990).

¹³ John Carmi Parson, *Medieval Queenship* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993); from an art-historical perspective, see Ingrid Sedlacek, *Die neuf preuses. Heldinnen des Spätmittelalters*. Studien zur Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte, 14 (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 1997); Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997); see also Edith Ennen, *Frauen im Mittelalter*. Dritte, überarbeitete Aufl. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1987; orig. 1984), 125–33.

¹⁴ Martha C. Howell, *Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities*. Women in Culture and Society (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986); Labarge, *A Small Sound of the Trumpet*, 1986; P. J. P. Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c. 1300–1520* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1992); William Chester Jordan, *Women and Credit in Pre-Industrial and Developing Societies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); Bruce L. Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England, 890–1215* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1997); Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England: Female Monasteries in the Diocese of Norwich, 1350–1540*. Studies in the History of Medieval Religion, 12 (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1998); for the concept of the convent as "Gesamtkunstwerk," see Albrecht Classen, "The Medieval Monastery as a 'Gesamtkunstwerk.' The Case of the 'Heideklöster' Wienhausen and Ebbsfort," *Studi medievali* XLIII, II (2002): 503–34.

women's role in the public economy faded away by about 1500, they later regained new influence even in such fields as book printing.¹⁵

Certainly, the Protestant Reformers strongly relied on highly effective psychological strategies in their battles against the Catholic Church, especially its institution of convents, forcing the closure of most of them, thereby denying women, above all, access to any form of higher learning and the practice of the arts. By contrast, medieval nunneries were, undeniably, powerful centers of the intellectual activities, of textile production, spirituality, herbal medicine, education, music, the arts, and also mysticism.¹⁶ We can safely assume that women were not allowed to serve as knights—but see the exception of Joan of Arc—and they were mostly limited in their public power and lacked in legal representation, but the projection of the subservient and muted woman who only cared for her children and obeyed her husband's orders represents a gross misunderstanding which was deeply influenced by struggles for liberation and emancipation on the part of nineteenth-century women, who resorted to propagandistic images of the subjugated and completely controlled woman in the past; images that provided the desired impetus to rally a large percentage of contemporary women to rise up against their squalid conditions of suppression and subjugation.

Recent feminist and, more specifically, gender scholarship has seriously challenged and attacked some of these traditional notions of medieval women as stereotypes and misconceptions, but such myths continue to serve as poignant specters of those "dark ages" for women and provide powerful, though mostly erroneous foils for modern feminism. In fact, since the eleventh century new notions of celibacy and gender roles emerged, as Jo Ann McNamara has observed: "The late eleventh- and early twelfth-centuries experienced profound disturbances in the gender system. Celibacy freed men from women. It enabled the clergy to use elements from both genders to construct a new model of humanity in which men could play all the roles. But it also freed women from the immediate governance

¹⁵ Albrecht Classen, "Frauen als Buchdruckerinnen im deutschen Sprachraum des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts," *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* 75 (2000): 181–95; id., "Frauen im Buchdruckergewerbe des 17. Jahrhunderts. Fortsetzung einer spätmittelalterlichen Tradition und Widerlegung eines alten Mythos. Methodische Vorüberlegungen zur Erhellung der Rolle von Buchdruckerinnen," *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* (2001): 220–236.

¹⁶ Bruce L. Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England, 890–1215* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1997); Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England: Female Monasteries in the Diocese of Norwich, 1350–1540*. Studies in the History of Medieval Religion, 12 (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1998); for the concept of the convent as "Gesamtkunstwerk," see Albrecht Classen, "The Medieval Monastery as a 'Gesamtkunstwerk.'" The Case of the 'Heideklöster' Wienhausen and Ebbsford," *Studi medievali* XLIII, II (2002): 503–34.

of men and from the biological constraints that defined them as women.”¹⁷ Of course, we have also to steer clear of modern myths about a golden age for women in the Middle Ages, and need to focus clearly on what the texts under investigation can tell us in concrete terms.¹⁸

Here I will illustrate the complexity of the issue by focusing on literary examples from the tenth, twelfth, and fifteenth centuries in which we hear of radically different conditions for medieval women in a wide variety of social classes and roles. Undoubtedly, on a broad scale, the Middle Ages were not a time of freedom and equality for women, rather the opposite was the case, at least measured in comparison with the modern world. Equally false, however, would be the assumption that history follows a progressive line toward perfection, implying that the further we would go back in time, the worse conditions would have been for individuals, groups, and social classes on the lower level, hence for women at large.

Modern investigations of medieval women’s lives have recently led to intensive and controversial discussions among scholars regarding gender roles, whether determined by nature or by nurture, being instinctual or performative (Moril Toi, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick),¹⁹ but we are often hampered by the lack of sufficient documentary evidence.²⁰ Not surprising, some authors have made serious efforts to reconfirm these traditional positions with regard to medieval women’s subservient position at the courts and in courtly literature, such as Jerold C. Frakes and Ann Marie Rasmussen. Frakes argues that medieval German heroic

¹⁷ Jo Ann McNamara, “The *Herrenfrage*: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050–1150,” *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees, with the assistance of Thelma Fenster and Jo Ann McNamara. *Medieval Cultures*, 7 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3–29; here 22.

¹⁸ Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 38–40; I would disagree with her at least with respect to the portrayal of women in medieval courtly literature; but even social-economic perspectives have often demonstrated the extent to which medieval women held a much higher share in work and finance responsibilities, not to speak of rulership (queens) than modern feminists tended to assume. See the contributions to *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages*, ed. Judith M. Bennett, Elizabeth A. Clark, Jean F. O’Barr, B. Anne Vilen, and Sarah Westphal-Wihl (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989). This observation even applies to the world of religious women, see, for example, *Fromme Frauen – unbequeme Frauen? Weibliches Religiosentum im Mittelalter*, ed. Edeltraud Kluiting, ed. (Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York: Georg Olms, 2006).

¹⁹ See Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler, “Becoming and Unbecoming,” *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. idem. *The New Middle Ages* (New York and London: Garland, 1997), vii–xx; Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*. *The Middle Ages Series* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 152–62.

²⁰ *Medieval Women and the Law*, ed. by Noël James Menuge (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2000), ix–xiii; for a great collection of relevant documents, however, see *Women’s Lives in Medieval Europe. A Sourcebook*, ed. Emily Amt (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).

poetry (*Nibelungenlied*, *Diu Klage*, *Kudrun*) portrays a world where male heroes dominate and women are condemned to play the role of chattel: "The women, as documented in the previous two chapters, simply reinforce the codes of conventional male political behavior, including the unquestioned patriarchal dominance over females."²¹ Even when we hear of a powerful female character in heroic epics, such as *Kudrun*, Frakes immediately identifies her as the proverbial female cog in the male wheel: "the necessary condition is that her field of action is so very restricted—in fact precisely to that sphere of traditional woman's action—that her 'sovereignty' is all but meaningless even in her own world."²²

Depending on the perspective, however, one could argue just the opposite, as *Kudrun* proves to be an enormously powerful princess who, though kidnapped and kept prisoner for ten years, never gives up her hope of being freed, always maintains her honor, hence her public status as a royal princess. And after she has been liberated, she quickly intervenes in military and political events to prevent an imminent bloodbath among her former captors at the hands of her male liberators. Subsequently she establishes peaceful, harmonious marriage relationships between the ruling houses of the formerly hostile countries to guarantee the establishment of constructive political conditions, thereby demonstrating the degree to which a woman could be projected as the dominant leader of her people.²³ *Kudrun*, like many of her sisters in heroic epic poems, but also in many courtly romances, takes actions into her own hands and demonstrates to the world that many if not most medieval women were not simply chattel and knew how to determine their own lives.²⁴ This finds its powerful confirmation in heroic epics such as *Dietrichs Flucht* (late thirteenth century) where Queen Helche exerts extraordinary influence both on the political and the military level and does not face any noteworthy opposition by the male nobles in her country.²⁵

²¹ Jerold C. Frakes, *Brides and Doom: Gender, Property, and Power in Medieval German Women's Epic*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 259.

²² Frakes, *Brides and Doom*, 264.

²³ For a well-balanced, thorough and highly convincing reading, see Winder McConnell, *The Epic of Kudrun: a Critical Commentary*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 463 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1988).

²⁴ Tatjana Rollnik-Manke, *Personenkonstellationen in mittelhochdeutschen Heldenepen: Untersuchungen zum Nibelungenlied, zur Kudrun und zu den historischen Dietrich-Epen*. Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe I, Deutsche Sprache und Literatur, 1764 (Frankfurt a. M. and New York: Lang, 2000); Marion Mälzer, *Die Isolde-Gestalten in den mittelalterlichen deutschen Tristan-Dichtungen. Ein Beitrag zum diachronischen Wandel*. Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1991).

²⁵ *Dietrichs Flucht*. Textgeschichtliche Ausgabe, ed. Elisabeth Lienert and Gertrud Beck. Texte und Studien zur mittelhochdeutschen Heldenepik, 1 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003); see also Ruth H. Firestone, "Queen Helche the Good: Model for Noblewomen," *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages: An Anthology of Feminist Approaches to Middle High German Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 528 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991), 117–45.

Neither Laudine in Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein* nor Enite in Hartmann's *Erec* turns out to be an absolute victim of male machinations, though each suffers from great pain and deep humiliation at the hands of their husband.²⁶ The husbands, moreover, also experience similar suffering and are put to shame for their actions. We encounter powerful queens, mothers, sisters, and mistresses in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*,²⁷ and in his *Tristan* Gottfried von Strassburg introduces a trio of highly influential, intelligent, learned, and passionate women: Queen Isolde, her daughter Isolde, and the chambermaid Brangaene.²⁸ Even if, in the course of the romance, the royal women seem to lose their political influence and are swallowed up by a newly emerging patriarchal system, as Leslie W. Rabine, for instance, believes, we still observe a surprisingly large number of cases where the female protagonist continues to exert her agency and determines her own destiny through many channels and intellectual strategies.²⁹

Although it has always been very fashionable among early feminist scholars to criticize severely courtly male poets for their derogatory, misogynist, racist, and materialist attitudes toward women,³⁰ there is a severe danger of reading modern

(Firestone does not, however, consult *Dietrichs Flucht*).

²⁶ Waltraud Fritsch-Rößler, *Finis Amoris. Ende, Gefährdung und Wandel von Liebe im hochmittelalterlichen deutschen Roman*. Mannheimer Beiträge zur Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft, 42 (Tübingen: Narr, 1999).

²⁷ Marion E. Gibbs, "Ideals of Flesh and Blood: Women Characters in *Parzival*," *A Companion to Wolfram's Parzival*, ed. Will Hast. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1999), 12–34.

²⁸ For a European perspective, see *The Worlds of Medieval Women. Creativity, Influence, Imagination*, ed. Constance H. Berman, Charles W. Connell, Judith Rice Rothschild. Medieval Perspectives, 1 (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1982).

²⁹ Leslie W. Rabine, "Love and the New Patriarchy: *Tristan and Isolde*," *Tristan and Isolde. A Casebook*, ed. with an Introduction by Joan Tasker Grimbert. Arthurian Characters and Themes (New York and London: Routledge, 2002; orig. 1985), 37–74; here 66–69.

³⁰ For the most recent example, see Eva Parra Membrives, "Alternative Frauenfiguren in Wolframs *Parzival*: Zur Bestimmung des Höfischen anhand differenzierter Verhaltensmuster," *German Studies Review* 25, 1 (2002): 35–56. She offers a very noteworthy interpretation, but also reveals stereotypical concepts about medieval women's allegedly downtrodden position and abuse by men because she reads modern expectations of women's full equality with men into medieval contexts. See also Helmut Brackert, 'der lac an riterscheffe töt.' *Parzival und das Leiden der Frauen*, in *Ist zwivel herzen nächgebür. Günther Schweikle zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. R. Krüger, J. Kühnel, J. Kuolt. Helfant Studien, S 5 (Stuttgart: Helfant, 1989), 143–163. Even as recently as 2005, Robert Scheuble, in his Ph.D. thesis, subsequently transformed into a monograph, *mannes manheit, vrouwen meister: Männliche Sozialisation und Formen der Gewalt gegen Frauen im Nibelungenlied und in Wolframs von Eschenbach Parzival*. Beiträge zur Mittelalterforschung, 6 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2005), argued along the same line, relying on a curious combination of psycho-history and masculine studies. His intention is, crudely put, to place the male world within courtly literature on the chopping block, utterly condemning them all for their mean-spirited, disrespectful, and abusive behavior toward women, acting entirely on behalf of a patriarchal society that was afraid of losing control to powerful women.

political agendas into medieval texts and to ignore the significant cultural context in which these romances and courtly love poems were created. This also implies that modern readers take rampant medieval misogynist statements, which undoubtedly existed, at face value, although Caroline Walker Bynum has correctly alerted us to the fact that there is "'no such thing as 'the medieval attitude toward women.'" ³¹ In fact, modern scholarship, and subsequently lay audiences have mostly paid attention only to male authors from the Middle Ages and thus felt compelled to view that past world as entirely characterized by misogyny and gynophobia, consequently instigating them to lament the alleged subjugation and mistreatment of women in public and private. ³² However, we are only beginning to understand medieval culture as a fundamentally discursive world in which the most disparate voices addressed the gender issue and presented highly contrastive positions. With respect to Old French literature, for instance, Simon Gaunt underscores: "The roles ascribed to men and women, the meanings attached to categories like 'masculine' and 'feminine' are not stable in Old French and medieval Occitan literature. On the contrary, they are constantly renegotiated." ³³ Consequently, to deal with the issue of misogyny and violence against women during that time period requires a complex method of diverse interpretive approaches, which leads us directly into the heart of cultural anthropology, gender discourse, and history of sexuality. ³⁴

Ann Marie Rasmussen tackles the topic from a very different perspective, as she analyzes mother-daughter relationships in medieval German literature as reflections of misogynistic attitudes revealed by the male authors. In her conclusion she admits that "the medieval world knew different, sometimes contradictory, modes of sexualizing women, so it knew different, sometimes competing, modes of creating femininity." ³⁵ Nevertheless, throughout her monograph she never deviates from her fundamental premise, strongly influenced

³¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, "In Praise of Fragments: History in the Comic Mode," *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 17.

³² See, for example, the theoretically charged contributions to *Violence against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. by Anna Roberts (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1998).

³³ Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*. Cambridge Studies in French, 53 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 286.

³⁴ Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, 1997); Catherine Brown, *Contrary Things. Exegesis, Dialectic, and the Poetics of Didacticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005).

³⁵ Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters in Medieval German Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 223; for a recent critique, see Albrecht Classen, "Die Mutter spricht zu ihrer Tochter. Literarsoziologische Betrachtungen zu einem feministischen Thema," *German Quarterly* 75, 1 (2002): 71–87.

by Trude Ehlert (1986): “Women’s instrumental function and the sexualization of women, the reduction of women to their function as sexual objects, go hand in hand, pervading medieval representations of mothers and daughters.”³⁶ Despite the various modes of arguments involving mothers and daughters, ultimately all medieval authors utilize, as Rasmussen sees it, this dialogue as a medium to determine womanhood according to the ideals of patriarchal society—a generalization that finds only partially confirmed in medieval literature and is determined by a rather modern interpretive filter.³⁷ A careful analysis of a variety of texts from the German Middle Ages (including a Latin drama) promises to yield more complex perspectives, as I hope to demonstrate in this first chapter, picking up the same argument in the following chapters, then changing the focus and the text selection, and drawing from a variety of theoretical approaches.

II. Critique of the Myth

If one searches for literary examples of subjugated women, one can always find some, both in medieval and in modern literature. One can also decide to absolutize these examples, and to ignore counter-examples. Not to follow the myth delineated at the beginning of this chapter and to demonstrate that the gender relationship in medieval society did not necessarily follow this patriarchal model will be much more difficult as it has always been easy to confirm myths, and very hard to deconstruct them.³⁸ It is one thing, to use an example, to unearth the highly disturbing phenomenon of rape in medieval literature,³⁹ and quite another to comprehend how medieval society legally, politically, and judicially reacted to this crime.⁴⁰

³⁶ Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters*, 23; Trude Ehlert, “Die Frau als Arznei: Zum Bild der Frau in hochmittelalterlicher deutscher Lehdichtung,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 105 (1986): 42–62.

³⁷ Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters*, 25, see also her conclusion, 223–24.

³⁸ Our task as critical readers is not to reconfirm myths, but to identify certain concepts and ideas as myths and to deconstruct them so as to allow human reason to dominate our thinking and to provide critical mirrors of medieval accounts. In this context, the analysis of medieval myths allows us to approach that time period from a rational perspective and to reflect upon popular but erroneous notions about that time period.

³⁹ Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Albrecht Classen, “Medieval: Treatment of Rape in Literature and Law,” *Women’s Studies Encyclopedia*. Vol. III: *History, Philosophy, and Religion*, ed. Helen Tierney (New York, Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1991), 308–10; Corinne J. Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2001).

⁴⁰ For a recent approach to this topic, though also relative one-sided, see Robert Scheuble, *mannes manheit, vrouwen meister: Männliche Sozialisation und Formen der Gewalt gegen Frauen im Nibelungenlied*

In the following section, I will introduce a number of intriguing literary examples that reveal significant evidence contradicting the simplistic notion of medieval society's being exclusively patriarchal. I am particularly concerned with the issue of violence against women in public, and how both male and female writers addressed this issue.⁴¹ Violence has always been part of human society, and so in the Middle Ages,⁴² and yet violence by itself does not shed significant light on society at large.⁴³ Modern American women, for example, know that they can always face the danger of domestic violence, of public violence (rape), or of political and religious violence. However, this does not indicate, all by itself, that women are helpless victims, pawns in the hands of male rulers or husbands. Moreover, men also experience violence, as violence is not necessarily gender-specific, even if individual and specific forms of violence might be.⁴⁴ Violence has to be examined in light of the social, legal, economic, moral, and cultural context before we can consider it as a marker of specific political conditions. Was medieval society entirely patriarchal and dominated by specific violence against women? Certainly and practically in every respect, it seems so at first sight, but were women, by the same token, therefore totally subjugated chattel, reified members of male dominated society and hence entirely voiceless? Raising this question also necessitates rejecting it unhesitatingly. To do justice to this vast topic, I will examine specific cases from different centuries and analyze the authors' views of the gender relationship, the role of violence, and in particular women's rights and women's defenders. In chapter five I will revisit this issue from the perspective of how domestic violence, or wife-battery, was treated by medieval and early-modern writers, whereas here the focus will rest on public violence against women, their physical and emotional suffering, and their loss of independence, if not even identity.

und in Wolframs von Eschenbach *Parzival*. Beiträge zur Mittelalterforschung, 6 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2005).

⁴¹ *Violence against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. Anna Roberts (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1998).

⁴² For the issue of violence in the Middle Ages, now see *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Routledge Medieval Casebooks (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

⁴³ Donald J. Kagay and L. J. Andrew Villalon, *The Final Argument: the Imprint of Violence on Society in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK, and Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1998); see also the contributions to *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Routledge Medieval Casebooks (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

⁴⁴ Anna Roberts, in her introduction to *Violence against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. Anna Roberts (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1998), 20, correctly emphasizes: "Violence against women was not a distinctive trait of medieval society . . . nor was it limited to overtly misogynistic discourse. It was an insidious flavor detectable in writing, whether an ornament, a trope, a plot, or a premise." See also the various contributions to *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen.

III. Hrotsvit of Gandersheim

The tenth-century Abbess Hrotsvit of Gandersheim composed a number of dramatic plays, religious legends, and epic poems, all in Latin, for the moral and religious uplifting, spiritual entertainment, and learning process of her convent sisters.⁴⁵ Most curiously, she had been motivated to compose her dramas because she had noticed that the comedies by the Roman writer Terence with their very worldly erotic themes had found a wide readership in her convent. In order to combat his 'evil' and debilitating impact on the nuns' mind, Hrotsvit took to writing to offer her convent more appropriate reading material or religious plays for dramatic performances. Hrotsvit's texts do not seem to have reached an audience outside of the convent walls in Gandersheim and in some monasteries elsewhere—they were composed in Latin—but when the humanist Conrad Celtis rediscovered them in 1494 in the Regensburg convent of St. Emmeran, he hailed them as outstanding examples of Germany's contributions to the survival of classical learning. For Celtis and his compatriots Hrotsvit became "an illustrious example of the Teutonic past which proved that Italy was not the only country favored by the Muses. Here was a woman who had held aloft the torch of classical learning in the 'dark north' of the tenth century."⁴⁶

Hrotsvit proves to be particularly interesting for our discussion because she explores violence to women in many of her texts, and sometimes it seems as if physical violence serves her as a benchmark for her female characters to demonstrate their virginal heroism and love for God.⁴⁷ Let us, however, first examine Hrotsvit's own statements about her work and her role as a religious writer, which will quickly dispel any modern notion of medieval women's

⁴⁵ For the most recent critical edition of her works, see Walter Berschin, *Hrotsvit: opera omnia*. Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Munich: Saur, 2001); for a German translation, see Hrotsvit von Gandersheim, *Sämtliche Dichtungen*. Trans. into German by Otto Baumhauer, Jacob Bendixen, and Theodor Gottfried Pfund (Munich: Winkler, 1966); for further comments, see H. Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera* (Munich and Paderborn: Schöningh, 1970).

⁴⁶ *The Dramas of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim*, transl. and with an introd. by Katharina M. Wilson (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Peregina Publishing, 1985), 17; see also *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: a Florilegium of her Works*, transl. with Introduction, Interpretive Essay and Notes by Katharina Wilson. Library of Medieval Women (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1998); for critical studies of her work, see *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, Rara Avis in Saxonia? A Collection of Essays*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson. Medieval and Renaissance Monograph Series, 7 (Ann Arbor: Marc Publ. Co., 1987).

⁴⁷ Eva Cescutti, *Hrotsvit und die Männer: Konstruktionen von 'Männlichkeit' und 'Weiblichkeit' in der lateinischen Literatur im Umfeld der Ottonen*. Forschungen zur Geschichte der Älteren Deutschen Literatur, 23 (Munich: Fink, 1998).

absolutely subordinate role within a patriarchal system and will deconstruct the myth of convent women as prisoners of their own sex.⁴⁸

Hrotsvit does not mince her words and does not hide her self-consciousness as a proud writer: "There I, the Forceful Testimony of Gandersheim, have not refused to imitate him in writing / whom others laud in reading, / so that in that self-same form of composition in which the shameless acts of lascivious women were phrased / the laudable chastity of sacred virgins be praised / within the limits of my little talent" (25). A number of intriguing narrative elements deserve to be singled out, as they reflect not only on Hrotsvit as a writer, but also on Hrotsvit as a religious person and as a leader in her convent. First, she is not shy at all about identifying herself as "Forceful Testimony of Gandersheim," that is, as God's mouthpiece to speak up to those who are under her supervision. Hrotsvit clearly implies that she joins a public discourse on the usefulness of classical literature within the context of the convent: "I have not refused to imitate him." She also indicates a strong belief in herself as a powerful writer insofar as she is not afraid to compete against this famous writer from Roman antiquity "whom others laud in reading." The competition with Terence is carried out in the self-same genre in which he had excelled, drama, that is, a literary genre that had hardly, if at all, been developed in the tenth century.⁴⁹ Hrotsvit proves her boldness by competing with Terence and also by severely criticizing him for his moral depravity: "shameless acts of lascivious women."

Obviously, Hrotsvit had thoroughly studied Terence herself, as she confesses: "Not infrequently this caused me to blush" (25), but she knew that a fully developed drama in the classical tradition heavily relied on specific elements inherent to this genre: "because being forced by the conventions of this composition / I had to contemplate and give a rendition / of that detestible madness of unlawful lovers" (25). Her intent is to glorify female virginity, which she could realize only, as she clearly states, if she also incorporated specific challenges to the moral and religious ideal: "the more seductive the unlawful flatteries of those who have lost their sense / the greater the heavenly Helper's

⁴⁸ Barbara K. Gold, "Hrotswitha Writes Herself: Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis," *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts: The Latin Tradition*, ed. ead., Paul Allen, and Charles Platter. SUNY Series in Medieval Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 41–70.

⁴⁹ Walter Berschin, "Passio und Theater. Zur dramatischen Struktur einiger Vorlagen Hrotsvits von Gandersheim," *The Theater in the Middle Ages*, ed. Herman Braet, Johan Nowé, Gilbert Tournoy. Mediaevalia Lovaniensia. Series 1 / Studia XIII (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1985), 1–11; here 9–10; see also Sandro Sticca, "Sacred Drama and Tragic Realism in Hrotswitha's *Paphnutius*," *ibid.*, 12–44; and Ferruccio Bertini, "Simbologia e struttura drammatica nel *Gallicanus* e nel *paphnutius* di Rosvita," *ibid.*, 45–59. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas. Epochen der Identität auf dem Theater von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*. Vol. 1: *Von der Antike bis zur deutschen Klassik* (Tübingen: Francke, 1990), badly misjudges the history of early-medieval drama by entirely ignoring Hrotsvit's works, see Fischer-Lichte, especially, 66–71.

munificence / and the more glorious the victory of triumphant innocence" (25). If we follow Stephen L. Wailes' interpretation, however, Hrotsvit does not simply idealize female virginity, but rather aims for a dramatic presentation of female steadfastness in faith and in morality.⁵⁰ Hrotsvit went so far as to develop a full dramatic program, writing the same number of plays as Terence, and she succeeded, as Wailes convincingly argues, in establishing a clear-cut theme for all her plays: "human life as a contest between the principles of flesh and spirit."⁵¹

Fully aware of the classical tradition of rhetoric, Hrotsvit characterizes herself as a person of "little talent" (25), a deliberate pun, as Katharina Wilson explains, "on her Old Saxon name: *Hruot* = clamor: *suith* = validus," or 'strong voice.'⁵² The struggle that this convent poet wants to project not only deals with a spiritual quest, but also, if not fundamentally, pertains to the conflict between the genders: "especially when female weakness triumphs in conclusion / and male strength succumbs in confusion" (25). Hrotsvit certainly contextualizes this struggle with implicit and explicit references to the divine and the nuns' ultimate goal to preserve their virginity for God's glory and the salvation of their souls.

Nevertheless, as most of her dramas demonstrate, female agency represents the highest goal for the poet who appeals to her audience to accept her presentation of strong and pious virgins as an indication of women's independence from patriarchal rule and their freedom to choose their own path in life toward God. Hrotsvit goes so far as to declare that she considers herself as God's mouthpiece: "that I return the gift I received to its Giver again" (26).

According to Hrotsvit, women's suffering from violence and victimization at the hand of men can never make them betray their true virtues and beliefs if they trust in God. In her play *Dulcitius*, Hrotsvit presents gruesome scenes of torture and executions of three virtuous women, Agapes, Chionia, and Hirena, in the time of the Roman Emperor Diocletian.⁵³ Although he offers them honorable marriages if they reject their Christian belief and return to the old Roman gods, they steadfastly hold on to their new, true religion and mock the Emperor: "we cannot be compelled under any duress / to betray Christ's holy name" (53). Even when Diocletian threatens them with torture, they do not show any sign of fear and express their desire to die "for the love of Christ" (54). Even when the three virgins are kept in prison, totally subject to any abuse by their male captors, they do not lose strength and can even laugh at the ridiculous behavior demonstrated by the Governor Dulcitius whom God gives a confused mind when he is about to rape

⁵⁰ Stephen L. Wailes, "Beyond Virginity: Flesh and Spirit in the Plays of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim," *Speculum* 76, 1 (2000): 1–27.

⁵¹ Wailes, "Beyond Virginity," 27.

⁵² *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim*, transl. Wilson, 1985, 31.

⁵³ The martyrdom of the three virgins actually occurred in the year 290 C.E., see Wilson, transl., 1985, 61.

the three girls. Instead of entering their prison cell in the pantry room, he is misled into the kitchen and confuses the pots and pans for the virgins. Through a hole in the wall the women watch him hugging and kissing the various sooty kitchen utensils and making a fool of himself. Instead of being violated physically, the three women mockingly observe how God is defeating their enemies, whereas their own bodies remain unsoiled. When Count Sissinus threatens them with their execution, they encourage him to proceed with his orders so that he can avoid being punished by the Emperor himself. This psychology has temporary effect, as he is now willing to have them burned alive (57), but he does not break the women's readiness and fearlessness, as young Hirena even states: "I hope to follow their example and expire, / so with them in heaven eternal joy I may acquire" (58). Agapes and Chionia die without their bodies being consumed by the flames, and Hirena dies from an arrow wound. Although Sissinus rejoices over her death, he has to learn from his victim that the true victory remains hers: "you shall be damned in Tartarus for your cruelty, / while I shall receive the martyr's palm and the crown of virginity" (60).

Hrotsvit succeeds in her play not only to develop and combine highly tragic and comic elements, not only to project a powerful religious message about God's greatness and glory, manifested through the three virgins' voluntary martyrdom; she also incorporates significant elements of the struggle of the genders. Dulcitius miserably fails both in carrying out his duties and in fulfilling Emperor Diocletian's orders to punish the girls, and he also fails to realize his personal sexual desires.⁵⁴ By contrast, the seemingly fragile and victimized virgins emerge as the true heroines, indefatigably strong in their belief in God and in their conviction that their martyrdom can only provide them with the freedom of their souls to merge with God. As Barbara K. Gold has observed, Hrotsvit assigns extraordinary strength and an independence in their mind-set "by transfiguring these women, making their weaknesses into strengths and showing them resolute in their battles against sin."⁵⁵

Both through her various prefaces and in the actual dramas, Hrotsvit proves to be an extraordinarily self-conscious, self-assured individual who, though within the religious context of her convent life, appeals to women to follow the virgin martyrs' example and to stake their claim on independence and freedom from male machinations. This freedom becomes possible through the women's absolute dedication to God and detachment from their worldly existence. To quote Barbara Gold again, "Hrotswitha uses the ambiguities and tensions in her plays to redefine the role of women in a difficult time and social milieu and to explore how women

⁵⁴ Wailes, "Beyond Virginity," 10.

⁵⁵ Barbara K. Gold, "Hrotswitha Writes Herself," 51.

could be frail but heroic; chaste and virginal even when subject to rape."⁵⁶ The more Hrotsvit projects women as physical victims of male superiors, the more she also demonstrates the true power of women, that is, the power of the weak who ultimately, through their spiritual strength and conviction, overcome the social constraints imposed upon them by male society and gain an enormous, quite unforeseen freedom.⁵⁷ Intriguingly, whereas Hrotsvit's literary figures, here the three martyred women, acquire their freedom only through a spiritual quest, through a rejection of their bodies, and hence through God's help, the writer herself demonstrates in multiple ways that she enjoyed even political, social, material, and religious freedom. As she states in her Preface: "If my pious gift pleases anyone, I am glad; / if, on the other hand, / it pleases no one either because of my own worthlessness or the rusticity of my inelegant style, / it was still worth my while, because while I wrote down the trifling efforts of my other works . . . in the heroic meter's norm, / here I joined them in the dramatic form" (26).

This is the manifesto of an independently minded author who fully plays with the rhetorical and religious tradition, freely operates with the literary material derived from Roman antiquity, and creates her own work irrespective of whether her audience might approve of it or not. Whereas Hrotsvit's *dramatis personae* still have to suffer through martyrdom of grotesque dimensions to achieve their self-realization, the poet proudly pronounces, even if couched in classical terms of the humility topos, to be the "Forceful Testimony of Gandersheim" (25), being both God's mouthpiece and the voice of her own self. Fully aware of the ambivalent nature of her status as a nun and as a writer of plays in which starkly erotic topics come to the surface, she rejects any criticism, refuses to be victimized by public comments, and illustrates how her female protagonists achieve their sainthood through self-imposed martyrdom: "victory of triumphant innocence" (25).

The more Hrotsvit humbles herself as an unworthy writer, the more we clearly hear her own voice and recognize her degree of personal freedom: "I am not such a braggart nor so presumptuous as to compare myself to the least of these scholars' pupils" (26). In her letter to the learned patron of her book, she humbles herself even further, but nevertheless gains a solid position in the shadow of these rhetorics because she makes herself to God's instrument: "God gave me a sharp mind, but my mind has remained / neglected Therefore, in order to prevent God's gift in me to die on account of my neglect, I have tried whenever I could probe, / to rip small patches from Philosophy's robe / and weave them into this

⁵⁶ Gold, "Hrotswitha Writes Herself," 57.

⁵⁷ For corroborative evidence for our thesis, see Jacqueline Murray, "Thinking about Gender: The Diversity of Medieval Perspectives," *Power of the Weak. Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 1–26; consult also the other contributions to this valuable volume.

little work of mine" (30).⁵⁸ Hrotsvit directly alludes to her own victimization through male learned society, but by way of troping herself as a humble ignoramus she powerfully catapults herself out of the dark back into the limelight of her own literary world,⁵⁹ as she tells her readers or audience: "It behoves you to examine and correct it with no slight carefulness / as if it were the fruit of your own labor" (30).⁶⁰

IV. Enîte in Hartmann von Aue's *Erec*⁶¹

Even the world of courtly literature seems to be completely dominated by male writers, if we disregard the late twelfth-century Anglo-Norman Marie de France, seemingly an exception to the general rule.⁶² I will return to her in the subsequent chapter where I will offer a comparison between her as a self-conscious writer and Hildegard von Bingen as a most powerful public figure who had gained her reputation through her mystical visions, her learnedness, and her poetic, musical creativity. Many of the courtly poets developed surprisingly sensitive character portraits of women as mistresses, wives, mothers, daughters, helpers, opponents, medical doctors, queens, and so forth. Most impressively, some male poets, such as Walther von der Vogelweide, successfully depicted women's love experiences and paid them as much respect as the courtly knights.⁶³ The literary world of chivalry, however, only functioned, as a superficial approach might indicate, because women were regularly attacked, kidnapped, threatened with rape, or actually suffered through this experience. The mechanism of the courtly romance relies on the damsel in distress who needs to be rescued by a knight, or on the courtly lady who is in severe need of male help which in turn causes the knight to experience profound suffering in his struggle against giants, dragons, or other

⁵⁸ Here Hrotsvit directly borrows imagery from Boethius's *De consolacione philosophiae* (480–524 C.E.) and indirectly relates herself to this great philosopher. For Boethius, see <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/boethius/boethius.html> (last accessed on Feb. 23, 2007).

⁵⁹ Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 67–68.

⁶⁰ Dick Harrison, *The Age of Abbesses and Queens. Gender and Political Culture in Early Medieval Europe* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 1998), provides highly valuable background information for the early Middle Ages, though he does not refer to Hrotsvit at all.

⁶¹ I will return to Enîte in the subsequent chapter, though there the focus will rest on the female protagonist's ability to make her voice heard.

⁶² Albrecht Classen, "Happiness in the Middle Ages? Hartmann von Aue and Marie de France," *Neohelicon* XXV, 2 (1998): 247–74.

⁶³ Walther von der Vogelweide, *Leich, Lieder, Sangsprüche*, 14th, completely newly revised ed. of the ed. by Karl Lachmann, with contributions by Thomas Bein and Horst Brunner, ed. Christoph Cormeau (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1996), L. 39.11.

knights. Indeed, if we accept this image as the social norm, then we would have to acknowledge that the traditional charge against medieval society as deeply structured by patriarchy was more or less true.

This also seems to be the case in Hartmann von Aue's *Erec* (ca. 1170/80) as the protagonist's young wife Enîte at first is accused of having been the cause of her husband's failure as a ruler, and then has to accompany him on his quest to regain his social reputation under most humiliating and painful conditions.⁶⁴ However, quite a different interpretation might also be possible, as some scholars have pointed out.⁶⁵ Enîte has been studied from many different perspectives, so may it suffice here to focus on the particular element of violence in relationship to Enîte's identity in order to relate the results of our analysis to our investigation of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim's drama *Dulcitius* with respect to women's roles within medieval society as reflected in literary examples.⁶⁶

As in many courtly romances, the hero has to undergo two cycles of adventures before he reaches the apogee of his social status and is capable of balancing personal interests and social obligations. Whereas in the first cycle Erec strives for the love of his future wife, in the second, much longer and more complex cycle, he aspires for public recognition and personal happiness. Enîte, on the other hand, plays a rather ambiguous role, as she at first appears as a highly passive figure, never fully able to communicate openly with her husband, a victim of her own and Erec's erotic passion.⁶⁷ The most critical and disturbing moments occur when Erec, deeply hurt in his self-understanding as king, husband, and lover, forces his wife

⁶⁴ For a survey of current Hartmann research, see Will Hasty, *Adventures in Interpretation. The Works of Hartmann von Aue and their Critical Reception*. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996); see also Albrecht Classen, *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung: Die Suche nach der kommunikativen Gemeinschaft in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2002), 109–66.

⁶⁵ Nancy P. Nenno, "Between Magic and Medicine: Medieval Images of the Woman Healer," *Women Healers and Physicians: Climbing a Long Hill*, ed. and introd. Lilian R. Furst (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 43–63; William C. McDonald, "The Likeness of a Lady: Concerning the Interior of the Hero's Shield in the 'Erec' of Hartmann von Aue," *Leuvense Bijdragen* 90, 4 (2001): 403–18; W. H. Jackson, *Chivalry in Twelfth-Century Germany. The Works of Hartmann von Aue*. Arthurian Studies, XXXIV (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), 120.

⁶⁶ Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*, transl. by Thomas L. Keller. Garland Library of Medieval Literature. Series B, 12 (New York and London: Garland, 1987); for the original, see the edition by Albert Leitzmann. *Mit einem Abdruck der neuen Wolfenbütteler und Zwetweller erec-Fragmente*. 7th ed. Kurt Gärtner Altdutsche Textbibliothek, 39 (1939; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006).

⁶⁷ Patrick M. McConeghy, "Women's Speech and Silence in Hartmann von Aue's *Erec*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 102, 5 (1987): 772–83; Wendy Sterba, "The Question of Enite's Transgression: Female Voice and Male Gaze as Determining Factors in Hartmann's *Erec*," *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages: An Anthology of Feminist Approaches to Middle High German Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 528 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991), 57–68.

to accompany him on his quest as his servant handling the horses and his equipment all by herself. Erec threatens to kill her if she is ever to utter a word to him: “dise kumberlîche spæhe / muoste si geloben dô, / wan si vorhte sîne drô” (3103–05; “She had to pledge to obey this disturbing capriciousness, for she feared his threats,” 45). But early on she has to warn him of imminent danger which he cannot see because he is riding behind her with his head covered with the helmet (3167ff.; 46).

Her words save Erec’s life, but after he has defeated the highwaymen, he severely reprimands her for breaking his order. Upon her pleading in self-defense, he does not kill her, but imposes upon her the demeaning job of caring for the horses. Several other occasions occur in which she is forced to warn him of the next danger, and then he penalizes her increasingly painfully. Although Erec should recognize her extremely valuable assistance in his knightly enterprise, he feels deeply humiliated and hateful toward his wife. The narrator does not waste this intriguing and complex situation by harping on traditional misogynistic concepts, but instead powerfully explores the highly sensitive and complex gender relationship from many different perspectives. Enîte, for instance, for a long time feels entirely worthless and dependent on her husband’s decisions, as she explains to the lord of the country: “swaz ouch mir mîn geselle tuot, / daz dulde ich mit rehte. / ze wîbe und ze knehte / und ze swiu er mich wil hân, / des bin ich im alles undertân” (3811–15; “Whatever my husband does to me I must tolerate it by rights. Whether he wants me as a wife, a servant or anything else, I am fully subject to him,” 55). Significantly, however, she does not act as a slave or as his submissive servant, but rather as his loving wife. Enîte constantly breaks her oath not to speak to him, not out of defiance or obstinacy, but rather because she knows that she has to save his life, even if this would mean that he might live up to his promise and kill her: “ich weiz wol, ez ist mîn tût, / wan er hât mirz nû zwir vertragen” (3983–84; “I know well it will mean my death, for he has tolerated it from me twice now,” 58). The narrator, however, clearly signals that Enîte’s words indeed prove to be Erec’s salvation, as he is fully armed and cannot see or hear well: “doch ez im solde wesen zorn, / er hæte dicke verlorn / von unbesihte den lîp, / wan daz in warnte daz wîp” (4162–65; “Even though it made him angry he would often have lost his life because of a lack of vision if his wife had not warned him,” 60).

The violence committed against Enîte is outrageous since both the narrator and we as the audience (both past and present) know quite well through the reaction of the other knights who are surprised, even shocked at the way in which Erec treats his wife. Even though count Galoain who tries to steal Enîte from Erec through trickery is motivated by very selfish concerns, he clearly formulates the public outrage at Erec’s behavior: “sît ich iuch hiute lîden sach / als missezæmen ungemach / der einer vrouwen nie gezam. / vil nâhen si mînem herzen kam / und

iuch noch dicke liden tuot . . . wer gap iuch armen selhem man / der enmac noch enkan / iuch gêren ze rehte?" (3760–72; "Ever since I saw you suffering such unseemly hardship today, which was never befitting a lady, my heart has been touched, and it still grieves me. . . . Who gave you, poor thing, such a husband who has neither the means nor ability to show you proper respect," 55). In fact, he is saying the right things for the wrong reasons, especially since he would probably behave just like Erec if he succeeded in convincing Enite of his superior attractiveness. Nevertheless, the argument, just by itself, sheds important light on Hartmann's agenda regarding men's treatment of women. As further indication, after Erec and Enîte have arrived at King Arthur's court, there is a noticeable rumble about Erec's unheard-of treatment of his own wife: "dâ wart . . . vil gevârget und gesaget / von ungewonter arbeit / die vrouwe Ênîte erleit" (5107–11; "There were many questions and much talk of the unaccustomed toil that Lady Enite had suffered," 74). The emphasis rests on "arbeit"—here in the context of 'suffering' and 'sorrow'—and "leit"—a further comment on the public outrage over Erec's brutality and breach of social norms!⁶⁸

But Enîte also experiences violence at the hand of other men, such as Count Oringles. After Erec had freed the knight Cardoc from two giants, he faints from exhaustion, and Enîte believes him to be dead. She laments and shrieks out of desperation, and she is about to commit suicide when Oringles arrives and prevents her from stabbing herself to death with Erec's sword. The count is immediately bent on marrying Enîte, although she unmistakably declares her absolute dedication to her first husband: "'den êrsten den ich ie gewan, / der müeze mir ouch der jungest sîn. / geloubetz, herre, ez wirt wol schîn'" (6299–301; "The first I ever had must be the last for me as well. Believe it, sir, this is the way it will be," 89). Oringles, however, is so convinced of his manly power that he disregards her words; he transports Erec's corpse to his castle and forces Enîte to come along with him, hoping that he eventually will be able to convince this beautiful woman to overcome her pain and to accept his offer. As she continues to resist him, Oringles begins to resort to violence, forcing her to sit down to dinner with him: "er zôch si hin sunder danc, / wan si enmohte im niht gestrîten" (6427–28; He dragged her away against her will, for she could not defend herself against him," 91). Nevertheless, Enîte does not stop grieving, and she even declares she will never eat again unless Erec would do so first, practically announcing her willingness to die. At this moment Oringles strikes her, hitting her

⁶⁸ For the many meanings of the term "arbeit," especially concerning its emotional dimension, see Otfried Ehrismann, together with Albrecht Classen, Winder McConnell, et al., *Äventiure und Minne: Höfische Wortgeschichte aus dem Mittelalter* (Munich: Beck, 1995), 17–22; for "leit" in its masculine and its feminine context, see Elke Koch, *Trauer und Identität: Inszenierungen von Emotionen in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Trends in Medieval Philology, 8 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2006), 168–75.

so hard that she begins to bleed profusely. He involuntarily makes her into a martyr, the same way as Hrotsvit had depicted the three virgins in *Dulcinius* as being victimized by their male oppressor. Significantly, however, the entire court voices severe criticism against Oringles's behavior, though only a few dare to stand up for Enîte: "sô dûhtez si alle gelîche, / arme unde rîche, / ein michel ungevuoge. / ouch wizzenz im genuoge / under sîniu ougen: / die andern redtenz tougen, / ez wære tœrlîche getân / und er möhtez gerne lâzen hân. / er wart dar umbe gestrâfet vil: / si wizen imz unz ûf daz zil" (6526–35; "everyone, poor and rich, thought this to be a great impudence. Several reproached the count to his face. The others said to themselves that this was a foolish thing to do and he should not have done it. He was censured severely for this," 92–93). But the struggle is immediately hushed up because Oringles refers to a husband's traditional power to punish his wife: "wie welt ir daz eruern mir, / ich entuo ir swaz mir gevalle?" (6547–48; "How do you want to prevent me from doing to her what I want?," 93).⁶⁹ He does not say that nobody has a right to intervene in the interaction between husband and wife as a couple, as Susan L. Clark has suggested.⁷⁰ Instead, he insists on his *munt* over his wife, the husband's privilege to punish her in case of wrongdoing, but he cannot influence the courtiers' mind, nor the audience's opinion, as Hartmann clearly portrays Oringles as a violent man certainly misbehaving toward Enîte.

Enîte, however, does not act like the usual victim, instead she displays the same attitude as the virginal martyrs in Hrotsvit's drama: "von dem slage wart si vrô / und ouch des tages nie mê wan dô . . . si wære gerner tût gewesen / tûsentstunt dan genesen" (6552–59; "She was happy about the blow, more so than anytime that time . . . She would have rather been dead a thousand times than alive," 93). Longing for her death, she is determined to speak up even further to arouse Oringle's anger to a point at which he would kill her: "der rede treip si sô vil / unz er si anderstunt / sêre sluoc an den munt" (6577–79; "She went on talking so long until he again struck her severely on the mouth," 93). But suddenly Erec awakens from his coma, startled by her cries, gets up, grabs a sword and kills Oringles and two of his men, and then escapes with Enîte. Once again her words have rescued her, and Erec does not even think of reprimanding her for another transgression of his command because her shouts to him (6584–86; 94) had awakened him and brought him back to action.

From here on Hartmann's *Erec* takes a completely different course, as the relationship between husband and wife assumes a profoundly changed character.

⁶⁹ Eva-Maria Carne, *Die Frauengestalten bei Hartmann von Aue. Ihre Bedeutung im Aufbau und Gehalt der Epen*. Marburger Beiträge zur Germanistik, 31 (Marburg: Elwert, 1970), 96, only comments: "die rohe Behandlung, die er ihr angedeihen läßt, erfüllt die Vasallen mit Widerwillen . . ." (his crude treatment of her fills his vassals with disgust).

⁷⁰ Susan L. Clark, *Hartmann von Aue. Landscapes of Mind* (Houston: Rice University Press, 1989), 81.

Enîte directs Erec how to find his way in the dark (6737–48; 95), and then he inquires about what had happened to them while he was in his coma. The narrator's words are highly significant in this situation since they reveal how much he is directing his audience's attention toward the new development in the two figures' attitude toward each other: "dô endete sich zestunt / diu swære spæhe / und diu vremde wæhe / der er unz an den tac / mit ir âne sache phlac, / daz er si mit grooze meit / sît er mit ir von hûse reit. / durch daz diu spæhe wart genomen, / des ist er an ein ende komen" (6771–79; "Suddenly the painful whim and the strange behavior with which he had treated her without cause up to that day, not having spoken to her since riding away with her, came to an end," 96). Curiously, though, we are also told that Erec only had tested Enîte's loyalty and faithfulness toward him, as he now begs her for her forgiveness: "bezzerunge er ir gehiez, / die er benamen wâr liez. / nû vergap si imz an der stat, / wan er sis vriuntlîchen bat" (6800–03; "He promised her a better life, which he certainly kept. She forgave him at once, since he had asked her lovingly," 96). Despite the narrator's efforts, the negative impression of Erec as a volatile and immature person remains, but the love between the couple makes it possible for the narrative to move on and to gain new dimensions, especially as Enîte soon has to rescue Erec once again. The dwarf king Guivreiz challenges the knight, who is still wounded from his previous fights and clearly weakened. For these reasons Erec is defeated and would have been killed by Guivreiz if Enîte had not suddenly thrown herself over her husband's body to protect him from the opponent. The martyr Enîte—if we may use the term in this context—demonstrates, once again, how much strength she commands within her society, though not necessarily in physical form, as her pleas for mercy reach Guivreiz, especially as she mentions his own name.

Remarkably, as we must recall, this is a romance composed by a male poet, but he shares very similar concepts about women and their relationship with men as Hrotsvit did two hundred years before him. Both writers present stark images of violence committed against their female protagonists, but the more these women experience physical suffering, the more do they gain in spiritual strength and emerge as the true heroes both in the opinion of their creators and, most likely, also in the eyes of the contemporary audiences.

This subtle but powerful admiration for the women characters is confirmed even in the midst of the most significant battle that Erec has to fight, in his duel with the knight Mâbonagrîn who had killed all his other opponents in previous jousts. Erec immediately takes it upon himself to accept even this challenge, because without gaining the victory in this one, the joy of all of courtly life would be lost, the famous "Joie de la curt" (8002; 111). Although it seems unlikely that Erec could conquer his opponent, a miracle happens, but not simply because of his physical superiority. As the narrator comments: "'geselle Hartman, nû sage, / wie erwerte

inz der lîp?" (9169–70; "Friend Hartmann, tell me how did they withstand it?" (127), referring to the seemingly endless fight from morning to mid day. The answer is also provided: "Their wives gave them the strength," 127), as Erec, for example, only needs to think of Enîte to gain "nâch manlîcher tiure vaht" (9187; renewed strength and manly courage," 127).

Erec defeats Mâbonagrîn, and thereby reestablishes the joy of the court, but Enîte plays an equally significant part as she talks with Mâbonagrîn's grieving lady, who is afraid of now losing her lover because they have to abandon the isolated garden and must return to courtly society. While Enîte consoles her she finds out that they are both related and they greet each other with full happiness, signaling to the world that enmity and hostility are a matter of the past, as the all-decisive family relationship has been rediscovered: "nâch disen niuwen mæren / jâhen si alle gelîche / daz si got wunderlîche / zesamene hæte gesant / in ein alsô vremdez lant" (9739–43; "At this latest news everyone said that God had brought them together in a miraculous way in such a foreign land," 134).⁷¹

The romance ends on a happy note as husband and wife return honorably to their kingdom and continue with their married life. However, instead of being totally enraptured by physical pleasures, they both now realize their social duties to their people and to each other: "der kûnec selbe nû huoter / ir willen swâ er mohte, und doch als im tohte, / niht sam er ê phlac, / dô er sich durch si verlac, wan er nâch êren lebete" (10119–24; "The king himself fulfilled her wishes wherever he could, but only in the way that was proper for him and not as he had done earlier when he gave up his courtly life for her, for he now lived for her honor," 139). This happy end, however, does not gloss over the hardship and the suffering that she had to experience in her life. Of course, in contrast to Hrotsvit's women characters, Enîte did not have to die a martyr's death; instead she was able to recover her personal happiness and well-being through her absolute dedication to her beloved husband. Nevertheless, as the narrator illustrates throughout his romance, Enîte had to endure a long period of physical violence against her person, not only as a test of her love and loyalty, but also because of Erec's failure as her husband and as a knight to recognize her as an individual and as an equal partner with her own will and personal needs.

Modern outrage against Erec's treatment of Enîte would be certain; however, a sensitive reading of the medieval text undoubtedly reveals the extent to which the male writer struggled to assign his character as much power and influence as possible during his time. According to Hartmann, the female protagonist surfaces

⁷¹ On the parallels between Erec/Mâbonagrîn and Enîte/Mâbonagrîn's lady, see Waltraud Fritsch-Rößler, *Finis Amoris. Ende, Gefährdung und Wandel von Liebe im hochmittelalterlichen deutschen Roman*. Mannheimer Beiträge zur Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft, 42 (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1999), 108–10.

not as a muted, silenced, and subjugated individual, although it might have been common practice at that time for men to treat their wives that way. Quite on the contrary, she dramatically demonstrates through her behavior, her thinking, and emotional reactions how much she both loves her husband Erec and knows how much she has to act upon her own terms so as to avoid tragedy and disaster for her marriage and her country. Enïte proves to be a deeply tragic figure, as she innocently suffers for her husband's political, social, and ethical shortcomings. But she accepts suffering as the crucial catalyst available to her to influence patriarchal society and to gain an independent position as a woman. This is not an independence in the modern sense of the word, though certainly extremely important for women's lives in the Middle Ages. Enïte discovers her agency because she loves, and as a loving woman she is willing to die. She does not suffer this destiny, at least not at this point, because her own words rescue her husband. Through her independent speech—and in this sense the words' meaning coincides with the modern understanding—Enïte shakes off her previous shyness, insecurity, and false sense of guilt, and emerges as her husband's equal partner, both in erotic-emotional terms and in material-political terms.

V. The Female Protagonist in Late-Medieval German Literature

Turning to the late Middle Ages, let us consider the highly unusual verse narrative "Die unschuldige Mörderin" by the urban poet Heinrich Kaufringer, who surprisingly follows the same model already established by Hrotsvit of Gandersheim four hundred years earlier, and subsequently developed by Hartmann von Aue shortly before 1200. Heinrich Kaufringer lived in Landsberg am Lech and descended from a family in the near-by city of Kaufing in Swabia. The historical documents record two people with the same name, the first being the father of the other, but it has not been possible to identify with the desired clarity which of these two persons might have been the author. The elder Kaufringer was *custos*, or sacristan, of the parish church of Landsberg in 1396 and reportedly died in 1404, whereas the younger Kaufringer did not leave any significant historical traces. Heinrich Kaufringer was the author of a number of influential verse narratives in which the gender conflict assumes central position, focusing on marriage, adultery, deception, virtues and vices.⁷²

⁷² Text quoted from: *Novellistik des Mittelalters. Märendichtung*, ed., transl. and commented Klaus Grubmüller. Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 23 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1996), 798–838; for information about the manuscript tradition and for a text commentary, see *ibid.* 1270–78. For parallel case studies, see *The Making of the Couple. The Social Function of Short-Form Medieval Narrative. A Symposium*, ed. Flemming G. Andersen and Morten Nøjgaard (Odense: Odense

This time the text takes us into the world of late-medieval aristocracy and discusses an extreme case of a woman's victimization by male society and her successful struggles to overcome all challenges in a highly enterprising and daring manner. The author introduces a noble lady who excels through her many virtues and her successful governing of her country all by herself. One day the king of a neighboring country woos her and asks for her hand, to which her brother, who is the responsible match-maker, agrees. Even though the countess is at first identified as an independent ruler, her own brother determines the marriage arrangements, serving as the *pater familiae* within a patriarchal society (34–37).⁷³ Nevertheless, the nubile woman is more than happy with her future husband and looks forward to the wedding which is highly praised by the people in both countries because the king and the countess enjoy the same public esteem, wealth, and nobility (40–44).

Despite this highly promising situation, tragedy lurks for the lady as she is maligned as a whore by the servant of an evil knight at the king's court. In the evening the knight follows his servant's advice and, pretending to be the lady's groom, finds a way into her castle and convinces her to sleep with him before the wedding night, although she wonders about his request and worries about her honor. The knight, however, inadvertently reveals his identity, and when he is asleep she uses a candle to confirm her suspicion. In her desperation she cuts off his head and tries to get rid of the corpse, asking the gate keeper for his help to drop it in the well. But the tragedy does not come to an end here, as the keeper seizes the opportunity and blackmails his lady to sleep with him as well in return for his assistance. In her desperation she agrees (335–36), but when he later indeed helps her to throw the corpse into the well and bends over to avoid making much noise, she suddenly lifts him up and throws him into the water, paying him back for his evil-mindedness (360). She spends the rest of the night working very hard to remove all traces of blood to protect her honor. The evil knight's servant, in the meantime, anxiously awaits his lord's return, arousing suspicion in the countess's brother and his men when they return the next day. They accuse him of having stolen the horses that he is guarding, and quickly hang him because he does not find any convincing excuse; in any event, as the narrative implies, he would have been guilty anyway of a severe misdeed.

In addition to this, the countess next has to worry about her wedding night as she has already lost her virginity. Whereas the entire company fully enjoys the ceremonies, she feels anxious all day without being allowed to reveal any of her profound pains (444–52). When the new couple is led to their bedroom, she

University Press, 1991), 67–87; Albrecht Classen, "Love and Marriage and the Battle of Genders in the Stricker's *maeren*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* XCII, 1 (1991): 105–22.

⁷³ I am quoting the text using verse references in parenthesis. All translations are my own.

quickly turns to a female confidant and requests that she take her position during the first sexual intercourse. Thereafter she herself would step in again and thus avoid being accused of having lost her virginity before her wedding with another man. She does not explain to the maid what has happened to her in reality, instead she only reminds her of all the good things she had bestowed upon her all her life (498)—a classical trope in world literature.⁷⁴ Just when everything seems to be working well, the maid suddenly decides to turn against her mistress and to remain in the king's bed because "si wolt selber künigin sein" (557; she wanted to be queen herself). In her renewed desperation the young bride, as her last resort, sets fire to the chamber once the maid has fallen asleep. She awakens the king and drags him out of the room, locking the door after having made sure that the maid perishes in the flames.

Subsequently the lady and her husband enjoy thirty two years of a happy married life characterized by mutual respect and love: "waren baide überain / und lebten mit ainander wol / si was aller trewen vol / gen dem werden künig her; / des gleichen was auch er / gen der edlen frawen clar" (618–23; both agreed with each other and lived happily together; she demonstrated all her loyalty toward him, and he returned the same loyalty to the noble lady). Nevertheless, the feeling of guilt over the triple, indirectly quadruple, murders lies heavily on her consciousness, and finally she confesses to him her terrible actions. It is to his credit that he does not accuse her of anything, rather consoles her and expresses his pity for the terrible suffering that she had to go through (690). Moreover, he pledges that nobody would ever blame her for her deeds, as she acted out of self-defense and was much more a victim than a victimizer: "wann du haust erlitten vil" (694).⁷⁵ In the epimythion the narrator discusses the question of her guilt and that of those who had to die, but since they all had been motivated by evil intentions and had actually committed a crime against her—"den ist allen recht

⁷⁴ See, for example, Gottfried von Strassbourg's *Tristan* where Brangaene replaces Isolde in the wedding night with King Marke, quoted from the edition by Karl Marold, rev. fourth ed. by Werner Schröder (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1977), vv. 12592–642. Intriguingly, Isolde worries about her replacement enjoying the sexual pleasure too much and missing the time to leave the marriage bed to avoid that their deception could be revealed. Kurt Ruh, "Kaufringers Erzählung von der 'Unschuldigen Mörderin,'" id., *Kleine Schriften*. Vol. 1: *Dichtung des Hoch- und Spätmittelalters*, ed. Volker Mertens (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1984; orig. 1981), 170–84; see also Klaus Grubmüller's excellent commentary with extensive references to many medieval narratives offering a parallel motif, 1285–88.

⁷⁵ Marga Stede, *Schreiben in der Krise. Die Texte des Heinrich Kaufringer*. Literatur – Imagination – Realität. Anglistische, germanistische, romanistische Studien, 5 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1993), 116; curiously, however, she focuses more on the extraordinary events as narrative features and considers Kaufringer's treatment of the marriage as an ambiguous enterprise as the idealization of the couple is undermined by the fact that she had murdered three people.

geschehen" (739; they received the just judgment)—the lady emerges as the true heroine, like the three martyrs in Hrotsvit's play and like Enîte in Hartmann's *Erec*.

The narrative clearly identifies her as a suffering woman who had survived only with the help of God (756–67).⁷⁶ In light of the previous examples, we can interpret Kaufringer's narrative intention as an effort by a male writer to idealize his female protagonist who demonstrates intelligence, wisdom, swiftness of action, absolute loyalty to her groom and later husband, pure love, and, ultimately, complete agency and independence as a woman. Although she is victimized over and over again, the countess does not despair and does not show a faint heart. She accepts the unavoidable and allows, for example, the gate keeper to rape her, not yet knowing how to overcome this male violator. As soon as the opportunity arises, however, she throws him into the well and kills him as a matter of self-defense.

Agapes, Chionia, and Hirena, in Hrotsvit's religious drama, gain public agency through accepting their roles as martyrs, and Enîte (Hartmann von Aue's *Erec*) achieves the same goal of establishing her own identity and gaining an equal position within her marriage by way of suffering and assisting her husband under any circumstance despite his order not to speak to him. The countess in Kaufringer's narrative goes one step further. She actively determines her own destiny by defending herself to the best of her abilities and does not shrink back from killing her oppressors, including her own chamber maid who wants to step into her place as the new queen. Kurt Ruh primarily considered the criminal aspects of Kaufringer's tale, concluding that the author had produced a sensational, though contradictory, perhaps even meaningless story.⁷⁷ But nothing could be further removed from the narrative's actual message, as the focus does not rest on the killing of the three men and the one woman. Both the narrative events and the commentary indicate that the suffering and victimization of the heroine constitute the true purpose. The countess quickly realizes that she has only one chance of fighting back against her maltreatment and abuse, that is, by not allowing herself to be victimized and instead by gaining agency and freedom (!) through her decisive defensive measures. The female protagonist does not become a criminal. Instead she rightfully fights for her own life, honor, and happiness, as each attack on her would have had the disastrous result—irrespective of her guilt or innocence—that she would have been forced to give up her marriage and enter

⁷⁶ Ralf-Henning Steinmetz, "Heinrich Kaufringers selbstbewußte Laienmoral," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 121, 1 (1999): 47–74; here 62, argues that the countess would have been declared guilty by the Church authorities if she had been put up for trial. The reference to God both in the prologue and epilogue, and the plot development itself confirm, according to Steinmetz, Kaufringer's and his contemporaries' new-found lay theology and lay morality typical of late-medieval urban culture where jurisdiction and morality liberated themselves from traditional theological authorities.

⁷⁷ Kurt Ruh, "Kaufringers Erzählung," 184.

a convent. The narrator unequivocally praises her for her decisiveness and sense of honor, and for her energetic counteractions; but he also laments her suffering: "die hat gelitten grosse pein / und darzuo vil manig swär" (752–53; she has suffered great pain and many hardships).⁷⁸

VI. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of these three literary works from the tenth, twelfth, and late-fourteenth century indicates a progressive development of the female protagonists. Whereas Hrotsvit introduces highly virtuous and pious virgins who would rather die than to pray to false gods, Hartmann presents a noble lady who undergoes a tremendous process of personal growth because of her personal suffering and deep love for her husband. Despite all her mistreatment she never waivers in her love and loyalty to Erec. In face of his assumed death she even demonstrates her willingness to die as well. Once the couple has found each other again after their near-death experience, they display tremendous respect and true love for each other. As our analysis has revealed, Enîte had accepted all her suffering as a means to help her husband survive in the most dangerous situations of his life, whereas Erec experienced enormous shame and humiliation because of his own failure as a knight and ruler of his country. Heinrich Kaufringer, finally, at the end of the Middle Ages, introduces a remarkable female character who also experiences tremendous physical and psychological violence against herself but who successfully fights back and defends herself intelligently, energetically, and forcefully, leading to the death of all her enemies.

Women's suffering in the face of violence proves to be the common element in all three literary accounts. Nevertheless, these women display enormous inner strength and succeed in overcoming adversaries through emotional, religious, and intellectual means of their own. The martyrs' death represents an utter defeat of male machinations and oppressiveness. Enîte's suffering at the hand of Erec and other knights ultimately makes us despise and condemn the male protagonists and provokes surprising criticism of the patriarchal power system. In a dialectical fashion, the more Enîte is mistreated by male members of her society, the more she gains in honor and respect as she proves to be the one person most in command of agency and self-determination since her victimization hurts society's sense of honor and self-respect. Finally, the countess in Kaufringer's verse narrative gains

⁷⁸ Steinmetz, "Heinrich Kaufringers selbstbewußte Laienmoral," 53; Hedda Ragotzky, "Das Märe in der Stadt. Neue Aspekte der Handlungsethik in Mären des Kaufringer," *Germanistik. Forschungsstand und Perspektiven. Deutscher Germanistentag 1984*, ed. Georg Stötzel. Vol 2: *Ältere Deutsche Literature, Neuere Deutsche Literatur* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1985), 110–22.

the highest respect possible because she does not let misery and tragedy transform her into a passive victim. She is introduced as a noble, honorable, fragile, and chaste young lady, as a model character for medieval womanhood. But she does not remain such a statuary figure, instead suffering transforms her into a female "warrior" who takes action into her own hands and bravely and successfully defeats all her opponents by means of her intelligence and swiftness of action.

These three texts do not necessarily challenge the patriarchal structure of medieval society. They also do not offer options for their female protagonists to avoid or overcome violence, as violence was and continues to be, alas, a factor of human life. Instead, all three authors project suffering women and show how these women overcome their suffering by refusing to be silent victims. In some cases this involves the willingness to die in the struggle for agency, but ultimately the struggle itself proves to be the main element through which these women succeed in defending themselves. Considering our three examples we have to conclude that throughout the entire Middle Ages there was a clear awareness of the many physical dangers for women. But our authors also indicate that women have rights, that they deserve to be seen as equal members of their society, and should enjoy the full respect of their husbands, lovers, and fathers. None of the texts implies concrete criticism of patriarchy as the fundamental structure of medieval society; by the same token, however, none of the women characters considered here accepts patriarchal power mechanisms serving for the oppression of innocent, honorable, virtuous, and admirable victims.

Each in his/her own way, Hrotsvit, Hartmann, and Kaufringer emerge as powerful defenders of women, and each of them indicates that the first step toward fighting violence directed against women is to recognize that specific actions by men are to be identified as violence.⁷⁹ Undoubtedly, these authors portray all their women figures as victims of violence, a violence just too realistic to be dismissed as a literary element, as W. H. Jackson confirms: "Women were at risk in Germany in the twelfth century in a society in which violence was prevalent, and in which women were prized, and vulnerable, as objects in the formation of alliances and the transmission of lands."⁸⁰ Notwithstanding these historical conditions, our three authors also indicate the extent to which women possess rights and can achieve agency to fight back against their oppressors.

To find confirmation for medieval "feminism," then, we are no longer limited to the testimony of fifteenth-century Christine de Pizan (*The City of Ladies* and *The*

⁷⁹ Albrecht Classen, "Witz, Humor, Satire. Georg Wickrams *Rollwagenbüchlein* als Quelle für sozialhistorische und mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studien zum 16. Jahrhundert. Oder: Vom kommunikativen und gewalttätigen Umgang der Menschen in der Frühneuzeit." *Jahrbuch der ungarischen Germanistik* (1999): 13–30.

⁸⁰ Jackson, *Chivalry in Twelfth-Century Germany*, 1994, 116.

Treasure of the City of Ladies).⁸¹ Instead we find amazingly refreshing defenders of women's rights already among tenth-century female convent literature, among twelfth-century knightly authors, and among fifteenth-century male urban writers. The issue of women's position within medieval society proves to be much more complex than generally perceived both by the lay audience and scholarship alike.⁸² Moreover, women found defenders not only among female writers (Hrotsvit, Marie de France, Christine de Pizan), but also among male authors.⁸³ Gender issues were not only topics of interest for female writer, but certainly also for their male contemporaries, not to forget the mixed audiences at the lay courts. Fortunately, recent scholarship has made huge strides in recognizing the discursive character of the gender relationship in medieval literature, though the focus then has rested mostly on French and English literature.⁸⁴

This observation also finds its confirmation in sixteenth-century literature, such as in Jörg Wickram's collection of entertaining prose narratives, *Das Rollwagenbüchlein* (1555). In "Ein junger gesell schlug sein braut vor der kirchen in das angesicht" (no. 87) a young bridegroom suspects his bride of having had an affair with the priest because the latter smiles at the woman when she arrives at the church door—a common motif in late-medieval literature.⁸⁵ When she returns his smile, the bridegroom immediately hits her in her face, pushing her to the ground. When the authorities learn about this event, they imprison the young man for several weeks, publicly demonstrating that any such violence, even among soon-to-be-married people, would not be tolerated.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Labarge, *Women in Medieval Life*, 235–38.

⁸² For a very broad overview coupled with detailed studies of individual texts, see Prudence Allen, R.S.M., *The Concept of Woman*. Vol. II: *The Early Humanist Reformation, 1250–1500* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002).

⁸³ Recent scholarship on medieval and early modern women's literature provides convincing support for our observation, see *The Defiant Muse. Dutch and Flemish Feminist Poems from the Middle Ages to the Present. A Bilingual Anthology*, ed. and with an introduction by Maaikje Meijer, Erica Eijssker, Aankje Peypers, and Yopie Prins (New York: Feminist Press, 1998); Albrecht Classen, "Mein Seel fang an zu singen": religiöse Frauenlieder der [sic] 15.–16. Jahrhunderts. *Studies in Spirituality*. Supplement, 6 (Leuven, Paris, and Sterling, VA: Peeters, 2002).

⁸⁴ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler, "Becoming and Unbecoming," *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. idem. *The New Middle Ages* (New York and London: Garland, 1997), vii–xx; broadly also: *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*. *The Middle Ages Series* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

⁸⁵ I will return to this issue and to this specific text example later. For the motif, see Birgit Beine, *Der Wolf in der Kutte. Geistliche in den Mären des deutschen Mittelalters*. *Braunschweiger Beiträge zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 2 (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1999).

⁸⁶ Georg Wickram, *Das Rollwagenbüchlein*. Text nach der Ausgabe von Johannes Bolte. Nachwort von Elisabeth Endres (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1968), 152–53; I will return to the issue of 'domestic violence' in the sixth chapter.

How far 'domestic violence' was regarded as a criminal act punishable by the church and state authorities, however, needs to be investigated separately. In the fifth chapter, for instance, where I will revisit the issues addressed here, I will begin with Wickram's literary example and slowly work my way backwards through the entire Middle Ages. Although violence was rampant during the entire epoch,⁸⁷ courtly and urban society made great efforts in limiting and channeling violence, including violence against women, specifically against women as sexual objects, and wives as innocent victims of violent-prone husbands.

⁸⁷ *Violence in Medieval Courtly Society*, ed. Albrecht Classen.

Chapter Two

Women Speak up at the Medieval Court: Gender Roles and Public Influence in Hartmann von Aue's *Erec* and Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan and Isolde*¹

I. Misogyny and Feminism in the Middle Ages?

There are many approaches to the study of medieval women's life, education, literary and artistic creativity, and political power, but usually gender-oriented scholars concentrate on those texts that were written by and for women, or on documents that portray women and even might have been produced by women.² If women writers do not assume center position, then those male authors who spoke derogatorily about women receive full attention. By following this curious research model, modern feminist and gender scholars seem to realize a self-fulfilling prophecy. Not surprisingly, Albertus Magnus's damning conclusion regarding women's character regularly gains full attention: "It is commonly and proverbially and popularly said that women are more deceitful and weak, irresolute, immodest, eloquent in lies: in a brief, a woman is nothing other than a devil in the likeness of a human form."³ The reasons for this by now almost old-fashioned method of casting a black-and-white picture of the gender relationships in the Middle Ages are self-evident, since it seems most reasonable either to listen

¹ Karen K. Jambeck, Western Connecticut State University, was so kind to read an early version of this chapter and to provide me with helpful comments. I am very grateful for this important feedback.

² A pleasant exception to this general rule now proves to be *Guidance for Women in Twelfth-Century Convents*, transl. Vera Morton with an Interpretive Essay by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne. Library of Medieval Women (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003).

³ Albertus Magnus, *Quaestiones de animalibus* 15. 11, 265, here quoted from Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages*. Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 161.

only to those female voices that reflect upon their own lives, or to allow male voices to speak and malign women out of deep-seated gynophobia and misogamy.⁴ This had led many recent feminist and gender scholars to repeat rather uncritically what some clearly misogynous medieval writers had to say about women, and then absolutized their statement, entirely disregarding the context, the specific discourse, and sometimes also the intended satire and/or irony. Bettina Bildhauer, for instance, reflecting upon medieval medical authorities, concludes: "Mere speaking to a menstruating woman makes men's voices hoarse, through the transmission of pollution from her breath via the 'unclean' air to the victim The idea that women's blood pollutes men is by no means limited to medical or natural philosophical discourse. Even the female characters in romances are often far from idealized pure and harmless women."⁵ Or: "That . . . it is any heterosexual intercourse which pollutes in this way is evident in a parallel episode in the anonymous romance *Wigamur* (c. 1250) Women's bodies are sources for pollution throughout *Wigalois*."⁶ Neither a careful reading of Wirnt von Grafenberg's text nor of the relevant research literature would confirm such a statement.

By the same token, however, the opposite approach also promises to yield a number of significant insights, whether we examine blatantly gynophobic statements in didactic treatises or generic courtly romances where the focus rests on the life and performance of the male characters. In the margins of the seemingly authoritative texts, however, where male dominance at first appears to fade away, we might find significant alternative voices, and we might also come across a different power balance insofar as the erotic discourse has always been predicated on the assumption of the existence of two genders.⁷ Satirical, ironic, sarcastic, and also aggressive and hostile texts that challenge women as direct descendants from Eve abound throughout the Middle Ages, but the more these male authors express their criticism and contempt of women, the more do they reveal surprising

⁴ Katharina M. Wilson and Elizabeth M. Makowski, *wykked wyves and the woes of marriage: Misogamous Literature from Juvenal to Chaucer*. SUNY Series in Medieval Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); for more balanced perspectives, taking gender issues into view, see *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih. Routledge Studies in Medieval Religion and Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), especially the introduction, 1–8.

⁵ Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*. Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), 100–01. See my review, forthcoming in *Mediaevistik* 19 (2006).

⁶ Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, 102.

⁷ For our purposes, I am exclusively focusing on heterosexual relationships and here leave aside, though only for pragmatic purposes, the wide field of homosexuality and Queer Studies. See the various contributions to *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 278 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004).

perspectives regarding the actual gender relations within their society.⁸ After all, fear, to mention just one aspect in this extensive complex, reflects as much about those who are filled with fear as it reflects upon those who are the cause of fear.⁹ Nevertheless, as various scholars have recently pointed out, either with reference to Heloise, mistress and later wife of Peter Abelard, or with reference to the many mystical writers, the high and late Middle Ages were characterized by intensive debates between the genders—debates that provided women considerably more influence on the public discourse than the official, often clerical texts would allow us to perceive.¹⁰ In other words, we have to be careful in distinguishing between, on the one hand, the official, authoritative, and all male voices in the medieval universe of the church and the university, and the amazingly fertile and diverse cacophony of alternative voices both at the fringes of and within these two institutions, on the other hand.¹¹ As we know from the numerous beguines, for instance, religious authority did not only rest with the male ecclesiastics, and many solitary religious woman enjoyed more respect within her community than the local priest. As Walter Simons concludes, “The greater opportunities for women to work in the margins of the urban textile industries, unfettered by guild regulations that applied to tasks monopolized by males, probably also explains why beguine communities became so much larger than those of their male counterparts.”¹² With respect to the numerous late-medieval anchorites in northwestern Europe, Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker underscores: “Some of the recluses developed into common theologians of considerable stature They proved to be formidable competitors of the parish priests . . . they could usually go their own way in the local community.”¹³

⁸ See the excellent collection *Women Defamed and Women Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁹ Jean Delumeau, *La peur en Occident, XIV–XVIII^e siècles: une cité assiégée* (Paris: Fayard, 1978); Peter Dinzelbacher, *Angst im Mittelalter: Teufels-, Todes- und Gotteserfahrung: Mentalitätsgeschichte und Ikonographie* (Paderborn, Munich, et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1996).

¹⁰ Prudence Allen, Prudence, *The Concept of Woman: the Aristotelian Revolution, 750 BC–AD 1250* (1985; Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997); Barbara Newman, “Authority, Authenticity, and the Repression of Heloise,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22, 2 (1992): 121–57; *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowleski (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹¹ See, for example, Roberta L. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance*. Cambridge Studies in French, 43 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 247: “By problematizing female reception within the romance, they [the foregone chapters] invite critical analysis by women readers beyond the text.”

¹² Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200–1565*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 116.

¹³ Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, transl. Myra Heerspink Scholz. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: The University of

Drawing from these various insights, here I will pursue a literary analysis of how the two Middle High German poets Hartmann von Aue and Gottfried von Straßburg projected the world of women in their romances, thus contributing to the broad gender discourse prevalent at their time.¹⁴ Both texts have been the object of careful studies for more than hundred years, but the traditional emphasis on the role by the male protagonist has blinded us to the considerable significance of the female counterpart.¹⁵ In this chapter I will argue that these two poets, representative of many others of their time, had developed a profound sensitivity regarding women's role within courtly society and depicted them as key figures within their world responsible for the maintenance of the ideals of love, marriage, chivalric ethics, and religious morals.¹⁶

We would probably easily find in Hartmann von Aue's, Gottfried von Strassburg's, Chrétien de Troyes's and Wolfram von Eschenbach's courtly romances, and also in the anonymous *Roman d'Enéas*, *Partonopeus de Blois*, or in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* many passages where the narrators pay lip service to traditional misogyny. But a close analysis will demonstrate that male poets often credited their female protagonists with a significant degree of independence, of self-assuredness, strength of character, and a supremely important role within their relationship—sometimes marriage, sometimes an open-ended love affair—with the male protagonist.¹⁷ As counselors, for instance, many courtly ladies emerge as deeply influential figures who know well how to guide the male

Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 176–77.

¹⁴ For *Erec*, see Carola L. Gottzmann, *Deutsche Artusdichtung*. Vol. 1: *Rittertum, Minne, Ehe und Herrschertum. Die Artusepik der hochhöfischen Zeit*. Information und Interpretation, 2 (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1986), 77–105. For *Tristan*, see Peter K. Stein, *Tristan-Studien*, ed. Ingrid Bennewitz, together with Beatrix Koll and Ruth Weichselbaumer (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 2001), 164–216.

¹⁵ Representative for the entire school of thought regarding women's roles in courtly literature, see Joachim Bumke, *Höfische Kultur: Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), 2, 454–66. For contrastive viewpoints, see *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages: An Anthology of Feminist Approaches to Middle High German Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik*, 528 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991), especially my introduction, i–xxi.

¹⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, "' . . . And Woman His Humanity': Female Imagery in the Religious Writings of the Later Middle Ages," *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell, and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 261–77; Jacqueline Murray, "Thinking about Gender: The Diversity of Medieval Perspectives," *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 1–26.

¹⁷ For a diversity of perspectives relevant for medieval German literature, see *Auf der Suche nach der Frau im Mittelalter: Fragen, Quellen, Antworten*, ed. Bea Lundt (Munich: Fink, 1991); for much more radically feminist approaches, mostly influenced by Judith Butler's theories, see *Manlichiu wîp, wîplich man: Zur Konstruktion der Kategorien 'Körper' und 'Geschlecht' in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*, ed. Ingrid Bennewitz and Helmut Tervooren. *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 9 (Berlin: Schmidt, 1999).

characters through difficult times either by advising them or by rejecting them, by assisting them or by directing them within their own power scheme. As Rosemarie Deist now observes, "In medieval works, the various types of female counsel are ingrained into the natural and socially expected responsibilities of feudal daughters, wives, mothers, and nursemaids. Often, roles are interlocked so that it is necessary to learn one role in order to take on the other."¹⁸

II. Historical-Theoretical Background

The popular image of noble women in the Middle Ages normally involves the stereotypical damsel in distress, the mute lady who passively awaits her rescue out of the clutches of a giant or a dragon from a knight in shining armor. She is the inactive, silent, passive, but always very beautiful lady who submits to the powers of patriarchal society, that is, the Arthurian court and the knights of the Round Table. Concrete examples would be Queen Guinevere and Queen Isolde who are simply abducted because their husbands have promised to reward an alleged minstrel with anything he might want in return for his performance.¹⁹ If we turn to early modern literature, we find similar examples of the submissive lady, best represented by Griseldis or Griselda in the many different narrative traditions (Boccaccio, Petrarch, Chaucer, etc.).²⁰ Most medievalists would, of course, quickly point out the inaccuracies of this image and refer to many contrary examples,²¹ but

¹⁸ Rosemarie Deist, *Gender and Power. Counsellors and Their Masters in Antiquity and Medieval Courtly Romance*. Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2003), 230. See also Joseph Sullivan, *Counsel in Middle High German Arthurian Romance*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 690 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 2001).

¹⁹ In many cases we might appropriately talk about women's rape, more or less openly discussed in the medieval texts. See, for instance, *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose. The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), especially 258–64.

²⁰ Volker Kapp, "Frauentugend und Adelsethos in Boccaccios Griselda-Novelle," *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 219 (1982): 89–108; Robert Hollander, Courtney Cahill, "Day Ten of the Decameron: The Myth of Order," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 23 (1995) 113–70; Corinna Laude, "Daz in swindelt in den sinnen...". *Die Poetik der Perspektive bei Heinrich Wittenwiler und Giovanni Boccaccio*. Philologische Studien und Quellen, 173 (Berlin: Schmidt, 2002), 286–94, offers the curious interpretation that Dioneo demonstrates with his novella the absurdity and also freedom of the literary account because Griselda's behavior defies all rationality and proves to be void of any meaning. From a philosophical perspective, Kurt Flasch, *Vernunft und Vergnügen. Liebesgeschichten aus dem Decameron* (Munich: Beck, 2002), 247–65, argues that Griselda's behavior reflects a highly stoic attitude and inner freedom.

²¹ Kurt Flasch, *Vernunft und Vergnügen*, 265–67, goes so far as to describe Griselda as deeply influenced by a philosophical attitude derived from Cicero's and Seneca's thinking.

they still would hesitate to refute the general charge that the medieval world was profoundly patriarchal in its power structure and that medieval women largely lived under a highly repressive system.²² In Sarah Kay's words: "Medieval society is patriarchal in so far as there is evidence for the simultaneous political superiority, not just of fathers, but of senior males."²³

In fact, recently some Marxist and Feminist critics have tried to reconfirm this popular observation from a literary perspective, arguing that many female heroines prove to be, in the final analysis, nothing more but chattel, victims of their fathers', brothers', and husbands' machinations, negotiations, and dealings oriented toward reifying and hence subjugating women.²⁴ Indeed, whenever we come across especially powerful women characters, such as Brunhild in the anonymous *Nibelungenlied*, or the garrulous, calculating, and very self-assertive Wife of Bath in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, ultimately we seem to observe their radical subjugation, at times tantamount to rape, leaving them behind as mere shadows of their previous female identity and self.²⁵

But is it really true that in the Middle Ages men ruled and women obeyed, men talked and women listened? It goes without saying that such black-and-white criteria quickly exhaust their interpretive potential and fail in their analysis of any complex literary text, as much theoretical and philological research on medieval gender has demonstrated. After all, the anonymous *Nibelungenlied* poet projects, despite the negative connotations, such powerful and influential women as Brunhild and Kriemhild, and Chaucer does not really ridicule the Wife of Bath,

²² For a counter approach, now see Robert Braunagel, "Die Frau in der höfischen Epik des Hochmittelalters: Entwicklungen in der literarischen Darstellung und Ausarbeitung weiblicher Handlungsträger," Ph.D. diss., University of Eichstätt, 2000, now also in book format (Ingolstadt: Publ. Consults, 2001).

²³ Most recently, see Sarah Kay, *The Chansons de geste in the Age of Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 81.

²⁴ Jerold C. Frakes, *Brides and Doom: Gender, Property, and Power in Medieval German Women's Epic*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters in Medieval German Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997); Eva Parra Membrives, "Alternative Frauenfiguren in Wolframs *Parzival*: Zur Bestimmung des Höfischen anhand differenzierter Verhaltensmuster," *German Studies Review* 25, 1 (2002): 35–56.

²⁵ Albrecht Classen, "Matriarchalische Strukturen und Apokalypse des Matriarchats im *Nibelungenlied*," *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 16, 1 (1991): 1–31; from the opposite perspective, Ursula Liebertz-Grün, "Das trauernde Geschlecht. Kriegerische Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit im *Willehalm* Wolframs von Eschenbach," *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 46 (1996): 383–405; Ingrid Bennewitz, "Der Körper der Dame. Zur Konstruktion von 'Weiblichkeit' in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters," 'Aufführung' und 'Schrift' in *Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Jan-Dirk Müller. Germanistische Symposien, Berichtsbände, XVII (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996), 222–38.

even if he views her with considerable irony.²⁶ As the editors of the *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing* now emphasize, considering the many different female voices we have discovered over the last decades, "Each woman realized the power of writing in different ways Certainly not professional writers, the women who may have written lyrics and romances nonetheless would probably have had a good grasp of literary conventions . . . , particularly when it came to gender."²⁷ And the new focus on the domestic sphere where medieval women enjoyed considerable freedom has unearthed, in Felicity Riddy's words, an "egalitarian discourse of intimacy."²⁸ Rüdiger Schnell now adds the intriguing perspective that the sexual relationship within marriage tended to reverse the traditional power distribution to women's advantage, which would explain why so many important political discussions between husband and wife take place at night, as many different literary texts at least illustrate.²⁹ In other words, gender has perhaps as much to do with discourse as with a biological power distribution, an observation which has already been explored in considerable depth by scholars such as Roberta L. Krueger, Simon Gaunt, and Anne Clark Bartlett with regards to medieval French and English literature.³⁰

To identify medieval society with patriarchy, without making any distinctions and without accepting a wide range of qualifications, would require an extensive investigation of what constitutes actual power, and what makes up patriarchy as such. It is certainly not enough to argue naively that any society ruled by a male monarch, or any other male representative, would have to be considered as a patriarchy. We might be justified to talk of a form of patriarchy when we observe a "closed class with hereditary membership passed from father to son," but it does not seem sufficient enough as an all-embracing criteria to define such a society where individual women and a matrilinear power structure would have been

²⁶ For a number of new approaches to this wide topics, see *Lustgarten und Dämonenpein: Konzepte von Weiblichkeit in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Annette Kuhn (Dortmund: Ed. Ebersbach, 1997).

²⁷ Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace, "Introduction," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. ead. (Cambridge, New York, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1–10; here 8–9.

²⁸ Felicity Riddy, "Looking Closely: Authority and Intimacy in the Late Medieval Urban Home," *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 212–228; here 228.

²⁹ Rüdiger Schnell, "Macht im Dunkeln: Welchen Einfluß hatten Ehefrauen auf ihre Männer? Geschlechterkonstrukte in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit," ed. id., *Zivilisationsprozesse: Zu Erziehungsschriften in der Vormoderne* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2004), 309–29.

³⁰ Roberta Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance*. Cambridge Studies in French, 43 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*. Cambridge Studies in French, 53 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

entirely subjugated or eliminated.³¹ To illustrate the dubious nature of our modern concepts pertaining to gender-specific power structures in the past, we can even refer to the medieval Church. Though entirely dominated by men, as far as the administrative hierarchy was concerned, we now know of many mystically influenced women such as Hildegard von Bingen, Mechthild von Magdeburg, Gertrud the Great, Bridget of Sweden, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and Catharina of Siena who deftly undermined the traditional dictum of women's subservient role in marriage and in public (St Paul to Timothy, 2: 8–15) and spoke up in the public and ensured that their own ideas were closely heeded if not accepted by the authorities and especially by the laity.³²

We tend to identify the world of chivalry and knighthood too easily with the world of nominal political, economic, intellectual, and religious power which was, by contrast, undoubtedly shared by members of both genders in various correlations. Consequently we forget that many queens, for instance, ruled all by themselves, or as their husbands' equal partners, which finds intriguing parallels in numerous literary texts where the female protagonists assume control and realize their agency, whether we think of Isolde in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan* or of Nicolette in *Aucassin et Nicolette*.³³ The same would apply to the world of the urban and peasant class.³⁴ Throughout the Middle Ages widows in the various social classes demonstrated that individual influence and self-assertion was not entirely dependent on one's gender. Of course, widowhood represents a unique situation in the life of women, and by default we would have to admit that married women enjoyed much less influence.³⁵ Correspondingly, both in the

³¹ Leslie W. Rabine, "Love and the New Patriarchy: *Tristan and Isolde*," *Tristan and Isolde. A Casebook*, ed. with an Introduction by Joan Tasker Grimbert. Arthurian Characters and Themes (New York and London: Routledge, 2002; orig. 1985), 37–74.

³² *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended. An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); id., *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); there are many recent studies on Hildegard and her power position, see, for instance, "Im Angesicht Gottes suche der Mensch sich selbst." *Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179)*, ed. Rainer Berndt. *Erudiri Sapientia*, II (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001); cf. also *Hildegard of Bingen. A Book of Essays*, ed. Maud Burnett McInerney. *Garland Medieval Casebooks* (New York and London: Garland, 1998).

³³ Helmut Feld, *Frauen des Mittelalters. Zwanzig geistige Profile* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2000); *Frauen des Mittelalters in Lebensbildern*, ed. Karl Rudolf Schnith (Graz, Cologne, and Vienna: Verlag Styria, 1997); *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993); for a specific analysis of 'agency,' see my study "Female Agency and Power in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*: The Irish Queen Isolde: New Perspectives," *Tristania* 23 (2005): 39–60.

³⁴ Many studies confirm this observation, see, for instance, Carol Adams, *From Workshop to Warfare: the Lives of Medieval Women* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); *Medieval Women and the Law*, ed. Noël James Menuge (Woodbridge, Suffolk, England, and Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2000); Ellen E. Kittel and Mary A. Suydam, *The Texture of Society: Medieval Women in the Southern Low Countries* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

³⁵ See, for instance, *Upon My Husband's Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe*,

world of peasants and among the city dwellers the relationship between the genders was much more complex and changed over time toward more equality than traditional scholarship has been willing to accept.³⁶ This is not to deny that patriarchal power structures dominated most medieval societies, but the global picture ought not to blind us to quite different conditions on the pragmatic level, both within the family and at the courts, both within the urban and also the rural society.³⁷

Certainly, to propose the opposite argument that women exerted much more influence than men, that they were the true source of power and leadership, would amount to similarly dangerous and irresponsible simplifications and speculations fed by wishful but entirely anachronistic and speculative thinking and illusionary concepts. Nevertheless we definitely need to steer our ship of analysis more carefully between the Scylla and Charybdis of patriarchy versus matriarchy, between male and female power in politics and economics, and we ought to try to understand the much more amorphous power structure of a society where men and women interacted with each other on an often surprisingly equal level, if we can trust the results of our literary analysis.³⁸

Consequently, in this chapter I will approach these global questions from a rather microscopic perspective examining various literary documents where women emerge as strong and independent, yet loving and caring, demonstrating

ed. Louise Mirrer. *Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Civilization* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992); *Wife and Widow in Medieval England*, ed. Sue Sheridan Walker. *Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Civilization* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993); *Medieval London Widows: 1300–1500*, ed. Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton (London and Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1994); *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner. *Women and Men in History* (New York: Longman, 1999); Albrecht Classen, "Witwen in der Literatur des deutschen Mittelalters: Neue Perspektiven auf ein vernachlässigtes Thema," *Etudes Germaniques* 57, 2 (2002): 197–232; id., "Widows: Their Social and Religious Functions According to Medieval German Literature, with Special Emphasis on Erhart Gross's *Witwenbuch* (1446)," *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 28 (2003): 65–79.

³⁶ David Levine, *At the Dawn of Modernity. Biology, Culture, and Material Life in Europe after the Year 1000* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2001), 288–324, properly entitles his chapter with "The Limits of Patriarchy." Dianne Hall, *Women and the Church in Medieval Ireland c. 1140–1540* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), indicates how much a close analysis of actual financial transactions, foundations of nunneries, patronage of art works, and economic data concerning medieval (Irish) women reveals a much more complex situation within medieval society than heretofore assumed.

³⁷ See, for example, the diverse views offered by the contributors to *'The Fragility of Her Sex?': Medieval Irish Women in Their European Context*, ed. Christine Meek and Katherine Simms (Dublin and Portland: Four Courts Press, 1996).

³⁸ For examples of female power qua public discourse, see Karin K. Jambeck, 'Femmes et tere': Marie de France and the Discourses of 'Lanval', *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 278 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 109–45.

their influence, self-assuredness, and intellectual and moral superiority through the power of their speech. In particular, I will argue that their communicative abilities provide them with a considerable source of influence that seriously seems to undermine the modern notion of the Middle Ages as a world ruled by men alone.

If we consider current scholarship, this approach seems to be quixotic by itself. Most recently, for instance, Christopher Young has defended the position to reject all attempts to discover female power—here with regard to Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Willehalm* (ca. 1218–1220)—because “scholarship needs to look beyond the words of female characters to the reactions of men to them within the text. It is clear from this feminist-informed analysis of *Willehalm* that women are allowed a certain role in the solution of problems. That solution, however, must be on patriarchy's terms.”³⁹ But it all depends on the types of questions we raise and on the parameters we use to assess social-historical conditions. Undoubtedly, as Madeline H. Caviness and Charles G. Nelson correctly observe, in the law books, such as the Low-German *Sachsenspiegel* (Saxon Mirror) from ca. 1220–1227, “Women's words held almost no truth value.”⁴⁰ And: “Women's verbal input was severely curtailed, at best indirectly reported by a guardian, at worst subject to negation by men, whose aural witness was privileged over women's eyewitness to a birth.”⁴¹ Perhaps a more careful distinction between nominal male power and actual female power might be appropriate.⁴²

As an introductory observation, it does not matter who runs a court or a country in formal terms, rather we need to identify who holds the control of true power which often does not reveal itself on the public stage and in many cases proves to be rather hidden in the obscure language of courtly romances. Moreover, the right to wield arms as a knight did not automatically imply absolute dominance in

³⁹ Christopher Young, “The Construction of Gender in *Willehalm*,” *Wolfram's “Willehalm.” Fifteen Essays*, ed. Martin H. Jones and Timothy McFarland (Rochester, NY, and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 249–69; here 269.

⁴⁰ Madeline H. Caviness and Charles G. Nelson, “Silent Witnesses, Absent Women, and the Law Courts in Medieval Germany,” *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 47–72; here 56.

⁴¹ Caviness and Nelson, “Silent Witnesses,” 72; for a more balanced perspective, see Peter Dinzelbacher, *Europa im Hochmittelalter 1050–1250: Eine Kultur- und Mentalitätsgeschichte*. Kultur und Mentalität (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2003), 133–36.

⁴² I have argued along the same lines in the “Introduction” to *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages. An Anthology of Feminist Approaches to Middle High German Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 528 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991), i–xxi. See also my study “Female Agency and Power in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*: The Irish Queen Isolde: New Perspectives,” *Tristania* 23 (2005): 39–60. For French perspectives, see Roberta L. Krueger, *Women Readers*, 202–04, et passim.

political or legal terms, whereas those who advise, negotiate, administrate, and decisively determine the course of politics and economics seem to determine the actual power, at least in the background of the courtly world.⁴³ This often applied to wives in their roles as co-rulers as well, but there were many other conditions under which women successfully gained access to power.⁴⁴ In this respect, the question pertaining to the actual and concrete privileges for men or women concerning economic, legal, military, and religious issues emerges as quintessential in the debate regarding the relationship of the genders and the power distribution in medieval society.⁴⁵ As Joan M. Ferrante has already observed, there were many women in the Middle Ages “who engaged in all spheres of activity, political, intellectual, religious, even military, whom we know about because they were in one way or another involved in letters, some as correspondents, collaborators, instigators, or patrons of works written by men, others as writers of poetry and prose, secular and religious.”⁴⁶

My interest here is directed toward courtly romances from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as fictional reflections of political conditions. Surprisingly, if we disregard Marie de France’s charming *Lais* (ca. 1160/1170), none of the major texts from that time period—whether we consider Italy or Spain, France or Germany, England or the Netherlands—was composed by a female writer. If we concentrate our analysis on Middle High German romance literature, for instance, we are confronted with exclusively male perspectives by poets such as Hartmann von Aue, Gottfried von Straßburg, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Wirnt von Gravenberg, Albrecht (von Scharfenberg), Konrad Fleck, Konrad von Würzburg, etc. Even though women play a significant role in each of their texts, and even though scholarship has repeatedly focused on the representation of women in their romances,⁴⁷ it remains an open-ended question to what extent courtly ladies

⁴³ Already in the Middle Ages this was considered as a serious issue deserving careful analysis, see Heldris de Cornälle, *Roman de Silence*. English and French by Sarah Roche-Mahdi. *Medieval Texts and Studies*, 10 (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1992); cf. *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996).

⁴⁴ Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex. Women’s Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts*. *Women of Letters* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 139–213..

⁴⁵ See, for example, *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter, Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); see also John Carmi Parson, *Medieval Queenship* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993) and, from an art-historical perspective, Ingrid Sedlacek, *Die neuf preuses. Heldinnen des Spätmittelalters*. *Studien zur Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte*, 14 (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 1997).

⁴⁶ Joan Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex* 213.

⁴⁷ Joachim Bumke, *Höfische Kultur. Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter*. 2 vols. Vol. 2 (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), 451–503, discusses many examples of how women were portrayed in courtly literature, but he limits his analysis to the ideal of feminine beauty, pedagogical ideals for women, and women as rulers. In this way he combines historical with literary-sociological approaches and confuses fictional projections with social functions that do not illustrate the true

were treated as nothing but decorative icons or how much they were actually presented as holding significant power even within the confines of courtly society.

Before we proceed further, we need to consider two major elements: First, these authors undoubtedly addressed at least mixed, if not at times entirely female audiences; second, all their romances reflect a courtly society where men and women freely interact with each other without giving one gender absolute dominance over the other.⁴⁸ Even though many social analyses have suggested that medieval women were mostly subordinated under their fathers' (husbands', etc.) rule, some of the male poets project rather the opposite and invite the audience to model their own society according to the ideals of gender relationship projected in the fictional works. Not surprisingly, most of these are characterized by intensive debates, dialogues, and other types of mutually relevant speech acts, often involving a man and a woman, which provides strong support for the theoretical approach that gender is decisively determined by discourse.⁴⁹ Alternatively, as we also might suspect, these literary projections reflect rather surprising power positions assumed by courtly ladies during the high Middle Ages.⁵⁰ Ann Marie Rasmussen offered a tentative perspective toward the gender debate in late-medieval German literature by focusing on the love songs collected by the Augsburg scribe Clara Hätzlerin in her *Liederbuch* from 1471.⁵¹

III. Hartmann von Aue's *Erec*

Here I would like to pick up the discussion of Hartmann's *Erec* from the first chapter and continue it in light of the gender debate by focusing on male perspectives that might be called "proto-feminist." One of the most intriguing

power structure underneath the level of representation.

⁴⁸ Joachim Bumke, *Mäzene im Mittelalter: die Gönner und Auftraggeber der höfischen Literatur in Deutschland 1150–1300* (Munich: Beck, 1979), 231–47; *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. June Hall McCash (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996).

⁴⁹ Peter Wiehl, *Die Redeszene als episches Strukturelement in den Erec- und Iwein-Dichtungen Hartmanns von Aue und Chrestiens de Troyes*. Bochumer Arbeiten zur Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft, 10 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1974).

⁵⁰ Joachim Bumke, *Mäzene*, 247, suggests that "fürstliche Gönnerinnen eine größere Rolle gespielt haben als die direkten Zeugnisse erkennen lassen" (female patrons played a bigger role than the primary documents allow us to recognize).

⁵¹ Ann Marie Rasmussen, "Thinking Through Gender in Late Medieval German Literature," *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave, 2002), 97–111. See also *Manlichiu wîp, wîplich man: Zur Konstruktion der Kategorien 'Körper' und 'Geschlecht' in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*, ed. Ingrid Bennewitz and Helmut Tervooren. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie, 9 (Berlin: Schmidt, 1999).

examples proves to be Enîte in Hartmann von Aue's *Erec* (ca. 1185), closely modelled after Chrétien de Troye's eponymous romance (ca. 1170).⁵² Erec's wife Enîte at first appears to confirm the negative impression of women's lives in the Middle Ages, as she is married off to Erec without any significant input from her side.⁵³ Certainly, she feels strong love for him, which he returns with equal force (1859), but it is uncertain whether this is limited to her sexual attraction to him or whether it reflects true feelings for him. In fact, as the narrator emphasizes, both appear primarily determined by their sexual passion, whereas true words of love, as we know them from contemporary *Minnesang*, are missing. In fact, the two young people do not even speak to each other and only sense an enormous attraction that forces them to the other person like a hawk to its prey (1861–86). Moreover, King Arthur organizes their wedding all by himself, whereas neither Erec nor Enîte assume any responsibility (1889–92) and at that point can only think of their sexual union (1873–75). The Bishop of Cantwarje in England joins their hands in marriage, and everyone present showers them with gifts, but the young couple never seems to find any time to deal with each other (2124–41); instead the court festivities and the tournaments occupy the groom so much that we do not even hear one word about Enîte until the end of the courtly celebrations. In other words, despite the great passion between these two, they have no opportunity to get to know each other and develop any particular communicative bonds. They are mostly determined by their physical attraction to each other, whereas they entirely neglect to establish a communicative community.⁵⁴

Not surprisingly, soon enough the situation at Erec's court experiences a sharp decline, because the protagonist, although having succeeded his father as king, pays attention only to his wife, or rather simply lives out his own sexuality to the full extent, and entirely neglects his public duties. By the same token, Enîte does not dare to speak directly to her husband and to reveal to him his own shortcomings. Instead of fulfilling his role as king, governing his country and providing a role model for his knights, Erec spends all his time in bed with his

⁵² Here I will quote from: Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*. Mittelhochdeutscher Text und Übertragung von Thomas Cramer (1972; Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992). The relevant historical-critical editions and secondary literature are listed in his bibliography. A more or less historical-critical edition can be found in: *Erec von Hartmann von Aue: Mit einem Abdruck der neuen Wolfenbütteler und Zwettler Erec-Fragmente*. Ed. Albert Leitzmann, continued by Ludwig Wolff. 7th ed. Kurt Gärtner. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 39 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006).

⁵³ This might have been one of the reasons why older German scholarship paid only lip service to Enîte, see Gudrun Haase, *Die germanistische Forschung zum Erec Hartmanns von Aue*. Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe I: Deutsche Sprache und Literatur, 1103 (Frankfurt a. M., Bern, et al.: Peter Lang, 1988), has no particular category for research on the individual figures in Hartmann's *Erec*.

⁵⁴ Peter Wiehl, *Die Redeszene*, 94. Chrétien de Troyes did not include any specific comments on this phenomenon in his *Erec*.

wife Enîte. Instead of sharing her observations and opinions with her husband, Enîte remains silent. But one day while he is sleeping with his head in her lap, seemingly deaf to her words, and while she openly reflects upon the public criticism of her husband (3029–32), he overhears her and is obviously deeply shocked, embarrassed, furious, and horrified about the turn of events, although he does not ventilate his feelings with any specific words and only issues orders for his horse to be prepared and tells his wife to put on her best dress (3052–63).⁵⁵

This one brief monologue, that is, just these few words uttered by his wife, leads to Erec's abrupt transformation, as he immediately forces her to reveal the whole truth to him (3045–49), then he gets up, equips himself with armor and weapons and leaves the castle, ordering Enîte to accompany him on his quest.⁵⁶ Significantly, however, he prohibits her from saying one word to him (3098–102), as he feels deeply humiliated by what has happened to him, especially because he had to learn the truth about his personal failure from her: "dise kumberlîche spæhe / muoste si geloben dô, / wan si vorhte sîne drô" (3103–05; this dreadful promise she had to give him because she was afraid of his threats).⁵⁷

As many commentators, however, have often observed, only because Enîte subsequently speaks up and warns him of imminent dangers facing him on his chivalric quest, is Erec capable of defending himself and strong enough to defeat all his opponents. Enîte consciously and deliberately breaks his ban on her speech because she is rightly afraid for Erec's life as his helmet prevents him from seeing and hearing clearly. Metaphorically speaking, her husband remains in total isolation from the world during the first part of his quest, and he particularly ignores his own wife, until he finally hears her yelling for him in time of greatest need at the castle of Count Oringles, which breaks the communicative ice between husband and wife and establishes a new community of equal partners. This development will require further investigation (see below), but let us first examine how Enîte finds her own voice within their marriage.

Despite Erec's serious threats against her, she repeatedly realizes that she deeply loves her husband and would rather die herself than to submit to her fear of being punished by him for breaking the oath, which in turn might endanger her own life:

⁵⁵ This scene has attracted much attention by modern Hartmann scholarship and is rightly treated as catalytic in the relationship between husband and wife; now see my study *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung: Die Suche nach der kommunikativen Gemeinschaft in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Mediaevistik, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2002), 109–66.

⁵⁶ Curiously, even most recent scholarship tends to overlook her pivotal role in this scene, see the summary by Will Hasty, *Adventures in Interpretation. The Works of Hartmann von Aue and their Critical Reception* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996), 43–46.

⁵⁷ For an English translation, see, for example, Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*, transl. Thomas L. Keller. Garland Library of Medieval Literature. Series B, 12 (New York and London: Garland, 1987), 45. See also *Erec by Hartmann von Aue*, transl., with an Introduction and Commentary by Michael Resler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987); here I will use my own translations.

“vür in wil ich sterben / ê ich in sihe verderben, / ez ergê mir swie got welle. / ez ensol mîn geselle / daz leben sô niht enden / unz ich ez mac erwenden” (3174–79; I rather want to die for him instead of seeing him being killed. May God do with me as He likes, my friend shall not lose his life in this way as long as I can prevent it). Out of love for her husband, Enîte does not protest against his irrational behavior, but she speaks up even at the risk of further punishment at his hands, and thus embraces martyrdom in an erotic context selflessly giving up her life to save that of Erec.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, her husband, not understanding his wife’s sacrifice and love for him, grows more and more infuriated by her behavior and imposes increasingly painful punishment on her, even threatening to kill her if she dares to utter a word again. His political power and her personal role and influence are intimately linked to the individual’s speech, as words—not so much arms and manly strength—truly determine, at least in the world of the courts, the relationship between people and public politics.⁵⁹

Despite, or perhaps just because of Erec’s brutal treatment of his wife—undoubtedly a case of wife battery which I will discuss later on in greater detail⁶⁰—the audience receives clear signals that he is to be condemned for his aggressive behavior against his wife. Erec’s typically misogynist statement about his wife and hence about all women that they desire particularly those things that are forbidden to them (Eve motif)—“ez ist doch vil gar verlorn / swaz man iuch mîden heizet” (3249–50; whatever is forbidden to you is quickly lost)—has to be read as the poet’s indirect criticism of the knight’s ignorance about the actual situation in which his wife saved his life, and so it sheds more light on his unreflective opinion than on women at large, especially because he repeats standard male stereotypes with very little meaning in this concrete situation. In particular, Enîte, despite a number of her own previous shortcomings, suffers innocently (5107–14).

⁵⁸ For further elaborations on this motif, see Scott E. Pincikowski, *Bodies of Pain: Suffering in the Works of Hartmann von Aue* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

⁵⁹ Susan L. Clark, *Hartmann von Aue. Landscapes of Mind* (Houston: Rice University Press, 1989), 51–52, suggests that the key issue here at work is perception and corresponding reaction to outside dangers. Whereas Erec totally fails in this respect until much later in the narrative development, Enîte proves to be a master of perception, both in social as well as in military terms. For a broad range of investigations concerning public talk and reputation both by men and women, now see *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003).

⁶⁰ For an almost radically, but highly productive, feminist perspective, see Louise O. Vasvári, “‘Buon cavallo e mal cavallo vuole sprone, e buona femina e mala femina vuol bastone’: Medieval Cultural Fictions of Wife Battering,” *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early-Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 278 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 313–36.

In fact, she proves to be a highly impressive character as she demonstrates an incredible degree of virtue, humility, and also physical strength even under the worst conditions (3445–49), as her love for Erec overcomes her fear of pain and even death. Whereas scholars have tended to focus exclusively on Erec's chivalric comportment, failings, accomplishments, and many different struggles to regain his honor,⁶¹ they have not realized how much his wife quickly grows into the center role and deeply influences her husband's personal development. In other words, Enite slowly but certainly emerges not only as an innocent victim within this marriage, but instead as the true protagonist, or at least as an equal partner. As Wendy Sterby avers, "A major part of the argument for Erec to bring Enite along on 'his' adventures, is that they both have clear-cut social responsibilities which complement and support each other and so it becomes impossible to talk about Erec's duties without including Enite or to examine her duties without including him. Hartmann is making a very strong case for the couple as a unit."⁶² After much suffering she impressively demonstrates that she knows how to establish her own identity and to defend her female cause both within her young marriage and within the political arena. Although he foolishly tries to restrict her speech, she resolutely disregards his blatantly misguided and mean-spirited order and speaks up when it is necessary to defend her husband. Consequently, when she believes that Erec has died as a consequence of his battle against two giants, Enite mourns her husband in a most dramatic fashion, shrieking, lamenting, and then preparing herself to commit suicide (6062–68).⁶³ Her monologue, however, attracts Count Oringles who prevents her from stabbing herself to death and forces her to engage in another round of struggles against male misconception of womanhood.

As I have demonstrated in the first chapter, Enite proves to be the leading character in this scene because she does not hesitate to accept her deep suffering for her husband and willingly embraces death. First she attempts to commit suicide since she believes that Erec has died, then, when Oringles abuses her so badly because she does not want to submit herself to his rule and accept him as her new husband (6515–49), she consigns herself to the possible death at the Count's

⁶¹ W. H. Jackson, *Chivalry in Twelfth-Century Germany. The Works of Hartmann von Aue*. Arthurian Studies (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), 107–16, never mentions Enite's considerable, if not decisive contribution to the narrative development.

⁶² Wendy Sterba, "The Question of Enite's Transgression: Female Voice and Male Gaze as Determining Factors in Hartmann's Erec," *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages: An Anthology of Feminist Approaches to Middle High German Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 528 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991), 57–68; here 68.

⁶³ See the studies in *Grief and Gender: 700–1700*, ed. Jennifer C. Vaught with Lynne Dickson Bruckner (New York: Palgrave, 2003).

hands (6560–69).⁶⁴ The more the men surrounding Enîte endeavor to accomplish their narrow-minded and selfish goals by chivalric and rather less-chivalric activities, the female protagonist demonstrates that she is the decisive force in this courtly romance. Not surprisingly, once she has brought back Erec out of his coma with her miserable cries for help—her cries are those of a despondent widow because she had to assume that no help would be forthcoming from her dead husband—she unwittingly directs him toward his true goal in life, that is, to defend his family in the first place, and then other people in need: “als er erkande ir stimme, / ûf spranc er mit grimme / und rûschte vaste under si” (6614–16; when he recognized her voice, he jumped up filled with wrath and rushed among them).

This dramatic moment signifies that Erec has not only woken up from his physical coma, but also from his metaphysical blindness. Nevertheless, it is still Enîte only who can show him the way out of Oringle’s castle—a site of his symbolic death—back to his own life as a knight and as a husband: “nâch vrouwen Enîten râte / (wân si in den wec lêrte) / ûf die strâze er kêrte” (6745–47; with the help of Lady Enîte’s advice [since she showed him the way] / he returned to the road). This then leads to the second round of adventures in which the male hero can eventually accomplish his mission and demonstrate his new understanding of a knight’s true obligations and commitments within courtly society.⁶⁵

Before Enîte’s active involvement in her husband’s life as a knight, Erec had certainly acted bravely and chivalrously, gaining general acclaim for his chivalric accomplishments, but his behavior did not translate into words and so did not reach society; in other words, he remained an isolated and soon quite forlorn hero lost in the metaphoric wilderness of his emotions. Only after Enîte’s soul wrenching mourning process and after she had decided to sacrifice herself for her

⁶⁴ Albrecht Classen, *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung: Die Suche nach der kommunikativen Gemeinschaft in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2002), 109–66, especially 140–41.

⁶⁵ Many didactic and other poets expressed their frustration with the failings of aristocracy and knighthood, see, for example, the Dutch courtly romance *Torec*, here quoted from *Dutch Romances*. Vol. III: *Five Interpolated Romances from the Lancelot Compilation*, ed. David F. Johnson and Geert H. M. Claassens. Arthurian Archive (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003): “Sie donken mi alle doget breken. / Si verderven die werelt al. / Bi hen soude rechte groet ende smal / Hem castien tgemeine diet. / Nu eest al valsc ende el niet” (2405–09). Another dramatic example would be the Middle High German courtly verse novella *Mauritius von Craûn*, ed. Heimo Reinitzer. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 113 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000). Although the poet emphasizes that knighthood has found a stable home in France (237–62), the narrative development clearly signals that in his time both the ethical and moral foundations of chivalry are dangerously undermined. For further commentary on this text, along with an online German translation, see http://www.gened.arizona.edu/aclaassen/moriz_von_craun.htm (last accessed on Feb. 23, 2007). Hartmann’s *Erec* does not yet depict the decline of the entire world, but the protagonist’s behavior, along with that of Count Oringles, suggests that cracks became noticeable already at the end of the twelfth century.

dead husband, does Erec slowly succeed in climbing back to his previously elevated status within Arthurian society and begins to help other people in need. But first he has to fall into a coma, strategically making room for his wife to assume center stage in the romance. Enîte at first reflects about herself, then she considers her husband's destiny, and finally shouts out to the world and appeals to God for help, hoping to establish a new community with the divine after having committed suicide in order to be reunified with her husband: "und bite dich daz dûz stæte lâst, / daz ein man und sîn wîp / suln wesen ein lîp, / und ensunder uns niht" (5826–29; and I beg You to uphold [Your own] law that a man and his wife ought to be one body and not be separated from each other).

Though she cannot function as a knight within courtly society because of her gender, Enîte proves to be the most remarkable character in the entire romance, complex in her nature, resolute in her actions, and strong enough to accept her own death as a consequence of her deep love for Erec: "des wart vil ungevüege / ir klage und schrê wider dem site, / und wânde den tôt gedienen mite" (6567–69; her lamentation grew beyond all measure, and she screamed contrary to courtly norms, and hoped to earn her death thereby).

Erec's sudden revival, the slaughter of Count Oringles, and the reunion of husband and wife in the subsequent scene represent a most remarkable turn of events for both protagonists, as Enîte's words have not only woken up her husband from his unconsciousness, have not only put herself at the risk of being killed by Oringles, they have also suddenly created a remarkable relationship between herself and her husband which had not existed before. Previously, Erec's ban on her speech as well as his overall treatment of his wife are clearly identified both by the narrator and by the members of King Arthur's court as outrageous and highly disrespectful. Moreover, Erec's and Oringles's physical punishment of Enîte is viewed by all witnesses as wrong and objectionable; especially the members of Oringles's court explicitly criticize the count, though none of them takes any concrete action to intervene and to protect the lady (6525–35), as he is their lord and claims that Enîte belongs to him as his wife (6546).⁶⁶

It is worth noting, however, that throughout the romance Enîte does not allow either of these two men—first Erec, then Oringles—to suppress her language. She speaks up when she needs to warn Erec of imminent danger, and she clearly voices her opposition to Oringles even though he hits her on the mouth trying to

⁶⁶ Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 107–35; Marco D. Roman, "Reclaiming the Self Through Silence: *The Riverside Counselor's Stories* and the *Lais of Marie de France*," *Crossing the Bridge: Comparative Essays on Medieval European and Heian Japanese Women Writers*, ed. Barbara Stevenson and Cynthia Ho. The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 175–88.

silence her.⁶⁷ In clear contrast to the previous conditions in the world of husband and wife, as soon as Erec and Enîte have escaped from Oringles's castle, he addresses her lovingly, inquiring about what had happened to himself, how she had fared, and asking for advice as to what they should do next: "nu vrâcte der kûnec Erec / vrouwen Enîten mære / wie er komen wære / in des grâven gewalt / . . . nû tete si im die sache / ir ougen zungemache / allez weinende kunt" (6763–70; now King Erec asked Lady Enîte how it had happened that he had been in the count's power . . . she told him, under many tears, how everything had happened).⁶⁸ Indeed, Enîte's words have succeeded in achieving a new and harmonious relationship between the couple, whereas her own words have, indirectly, brought death to the male opponents. Certainly, Erec fights with his sword and slaughters the physical enemies, and he even defeats mighty Mâbonagrîn who had both symbolically and pragmatically kidnapped the happiness of the courtly world. Despite the various strategies and knightly operations by the male protagonists, Enîte speaks up and makes it possible for Erec to succeed in recovering his own and her public honor by reintegrating women into public society.⁶⁹

In her slowly developing role as master of talk, though long after the wedding and only reaching its peak during the first stages of the dramatic events at the critically neglected court of Erec's kingdom, Enîte demonstrates that she is the true protagonist in Hartmann's romance. Certainly, Erec is the active character, insofar as the text's chivalric progression seemingly focuses on his battles, his military conflicts, and the various struggles in his life. But after the most dramatic conflict at Count Oringles's castle, we begin to realize that Erec's knightly adventures are not the all-determining issue in this romance. If Enîte had not spoken up at the very beginning, involuntarily alerting her husband to his failings, the entire

⁶⁷ Patrick M. McConeghy, "Women's Speech and Silence in Hartmann von Aue's *Erec*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 102, 5 (1987): 772–83; Wendy Sterba, "The Question of Enîte's Transgression: Female Voice and Male Gaze as Determining Factors in Hartmann's *Erec*," *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages: An Anthology of Feminist Approaches to Middle High German Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 528 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991), 57–68.

⁶⁸ For further discussion of Enîte and other women characters in Hartmann's romance, see Eva-Maria Carne, *Die Frauengestalten bei Hartmann von Aue. Ihre Bedeutung im Aufbau und Gehalt der Epen*. Marburger Beiträge zur Germanistik, 31 (Marburg: Elwert, 1970); cf. also Susan L. Clark, *Hartmann von Aue. Landscapes of Mind* (Houston: Rice University Press, 1989). From an interdisciplinary perspective, see Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, "Introduction: A New Economy of Power Relations: Female Agency in the Middle Ages," *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. eadem (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 1–16; here 15–16.

⁶⁹ Wendy Sterba, "The Question of Enîte's Transgression," 66, emphasizes: "The lesson for the virtuous medieval woman is that she should be circumspect in her speech, but she should feel free to express herself when she knows it to be important."

second quest for adventures would not have been initiated. Erec would not have learned his lesson, and courtly society would still have been bereft of the “Joie de la curt” (9601; happiness of the court). Love between Erec and Enîte would not have been translated into a productive communicative community, and the full understanding of the meaning of chivalry still would be missing.⁷⁰

If Enîte had not broken Erec’s ban on her speech and had not warned him in time of the approaching challengers, he would have had a very poor chance of defending himself against the various attackers. Both shame and death would have fallen upon Erec, and so upon courtly society, the very principles of which were already severely undermined by Mâbonagrîn’s erotic prison in the garden with his lady.

If Enîte had not cried out to Erec while he suffered from his coma, she would not have awakened him up both to an active life and, most important, to his true self as a knight in defense of his wife, of other women, and of the rest of courtly society. Even though Erec had tried to mute his wife in time of his own greatest need, she refused to obey his order for his own self-interest, and she fights so long for her lover, until he finally realizes his own mistakes, his blindness, and ignorance and accepts her as his equal partner in their marriage. In fact, Erec surfaces as a function of Enîte and other women, as a physical proxy of their words, and not the other way around, as he always takes action when she speaks up and admonishes him to take his sword and fight for all of their honor. Even though Erec, along with other male members of the courts, seems to be in charge and exerts pain as a consequence of his violent actions affecting both his foes and his own wife, “pain may also represent a form of self-empowerment to the courtly lady, an accepted means by which she can openly express herself in a male dominated society that stressed the social importance of a lady’s silence in many situations.”⁷¹

Certainly, Hartmann has not created a travesty of male chivalry, and he has not secretly composed a parody of the Arthurian world. On the contrary, he triumphantly celebrates the establishment of the ideal world of male knighthood.⁷² Remarkably, however, Hartmann’s romance paves the way for another perspective, toward courtly women and their role as the intellectual, emotive, and sensitive centers of the chivalric universe where the central function of human language—communication—proves to be most fundamental and influential, whereas the battles with the sword emerge as secondary and only clear the way for the truly significant exchange among the members of courtly society.

⁷⁰ See the analysis of this particular aspect in my monograph *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung*, 2002, 109–56.

⁷¹ Scott Pincikowski, *Bodies of Pain*, 91.

⁷² W. H. Jackson, *Chivalry*, 84–146.

When Enîte protects Erec from the dwarf king Guivreiz after their second encounter, she formulates most clearly the ideas of chivalry: "gewünne dû ie ritters muot, / niht erslach mir mînen man! . . . / dû bist sus gar âne êre, / swaz dû im nû mê getuost, / wan dû es sünde haben muost" (6946–53; if you have ever won knightly spirit, then don't slaughter my husband! . . . you would lose all your honor if you do anything else to him, since this would be sinful of you). And after Erec has defeated Mâbonagrîn, the latter's lady and Enîte realize that they are related and that they can reach out to each other by means of their words: "und sich mit rede engesten / und sageten swaz si westen" (9714–15; they reached out to each other and told each other what they knew). Undoubtedly, Erec assumes the central role in overcoming all the opponents who threaten the well-being of the Arthurian world, but he realizes many times, especially in the last battle against Mâbonagrîn, that he depends as much on his wife for inner strength, happiness, and confidence as she depends on him for her physical protection (9230–31).⁷³

IV. Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*

These observations regarding the gender relationship in Hartmann's romance largely also apply to Gottfried of Straßburg's *Tristan und Isolde* (ca. 1210) where courtly women and men closely interact with each other to achieve some kind of utopia of love.⁷⁴ Here I disregard the mysterious yet highly influential role of Isolde's mother, the Irish Queen Isolde, though she would certainly confirm the thesis that some courtly ladies, at least those presented in the literary context, exerted tremendous influence not only in their own country, but also far beyond

⁷³ Scott Pincikowski, *Bodies of Pain*, 95: "When Hartmann depicts female suffering within the context of the refined and civilized life of the court, it becomes apparent that he criticizes the female condition in medieval society."

⁷⁴ Here quoted from: Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*. 2 vols. Nach dem Text von Friedrich Ranke neu herausgegeben, ins Neuhochdeutsche übersetzt, mit einem Stellenkommentar und einem Nachwort von Rüdiger Krohn (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980). Now see also: Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*. Vol. 1: *Text*, ed. Karl Marold. Unveränderter fünfter Abdruck nach dem dritten, mit einem auf Grund von Friedrich Rankes Kollationen verbesserten kritischen Apparat besorgt und mit einem erweiterten Nachwort versehen von Werner Schröder. Vol. 2: *Übersetzung*, by Peter Knecht. Introduction by Tomas Tomasek (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2004). Research on Gottfried's *Tristan* has reached unforeseen and almost incomprehensible proportions, see, for instance, the journal *Tristania*, ed. Albrecht Classen; and most recently *Der "Tristan" Gottfrieds von Straßburg. Symposium Santiago de Compostela, 5. bis 8. April 2000*, ed. Christoph Huber and Victor Millet (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2002). For a discussion of the concept of utopia in Gottfried's *Tristan*, see Tomas Tomasek, *Die Utopie im "Tristan" Gottfrieds von Straßburg*. *Hermaea N.F.*, 4 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985).

the borders, both in personal and in political terms.⁷⁵ Gottfried's *Tristan*, however, does not inform us in any specific way about the relationship between King Gurmûn and his wife Isolde, except for some short references to the queen's powerful position as Morold's sister and hence as the one who provided Gurmûn with the necessary legitimacy to rule over Ireland (5931–34).

Although the narrative focus seems to rest on the male protagonist, Tristan, young Isolde's influence and significance first as princess, then as mistress, finally as wife and queen, but most important as Tristan's destiny in the universe of love, demonstrates how much individual women could be regarded as central for the development of the love affair and the political structure, providing the narrative background for the erotic relationship. Whereas Tristan appeared on the scene early on virtually perfect in his education, artistic and knightly skills, and diplomatic abilities, never to grow or develop any further, the situation with Isolde is quite different. Once Isolde has fallen in love with Tristan, shortly before her wedding with King Marke, she is soon challenged in her ethical and moral principles, as rumors about her illicit relationship with Tristan quickly spread at court. Her jealous husband repeatedly tests Isolde, asking her to comment on his own departure for a pilgrimage and catches her red-handed, so to speak, as she immediately identifies Tristan as the ideal person at the court to provide her with the necessary protection (13673–98).⁷⁶

During these early trial scenes Isolde does not yet manage to avoid the traps set by her husband, as she does not command as many linguistic skills and the same rhetorical and intellectual circumspection as the courtly spies and King Marke himself. But she has very good teachers in Brangaene and Tristan, both supreme masters of language and deception.⁷⁷ The romance offers many insights into

⁷⁵ Albrecht Classen, "Matriarchy versus Patriarchy: The Role of Queen Isolde in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*," *Neophilologus* LXXIII, 1 (1989): 77–89; critical against this position, Marion Mälzer, *Die Isolde-Gestalt in den mittelalterlichen deutschen Tristan-Dichtungen. Ein Beitrag zum diachronischen Wandel. Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1991), 146, note 293a, but she also agrees that the mother Isolde represents something like a matriarchy, 92–93. See also Leslie W. Rabine, "Love and the New Patriarchy: *Tristan and Isolde*," *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook*, ed. with an Introduction by Joan Tasker Grimbert. *Arthurian Characters and Themes* (1995; New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 37–74; here 50–57 (orig. 1985). Cf. my recent study "Female Agency and Power in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*: The Irish Queen Isolde: New Perspectives," *Tristania* 23 (2005): 39–60.

⁷⁶ Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, chapter xxi; for a good analysis of King Marke's ambiguous role in the battle of wits between him and the two lovers, see Monika Schausten, *Erzählwelten der Tristangeschichte im hohen Mittelalter: Untersuchungen zu den deutschsprachigen Tristanfassungen des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts*. *Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur*, 24 (Munich: Fink, 1999), 173–78.

⁷⁷ For a critical examination of Brangæne, see Miriam Rheingold Fuller, "Shadow, Support, and Surrogate: Brangæne in the Tristan Legends," *Tristania* 21 (2001–2002): 13–41; for a study of the list applied in these strategies, see Wolfgang Jupé, *Die "List" im Tristanroman Gottfrieds von Strassburg*:

Isolde's development from being a rather naive young lady to a highly educated, politically sophisticated, and communicatively well-trained personality (13673–15046); she starts out as a victim of her family's and especially Tristan's manipulations insofar as she is the pawn in the complicated bridal quest negotiations and the token prize for the peace between Ireland and Cornwall ("ine weiz, wie ich verkoufet bin, / und enweiz ouch, waz mîn werden sol" [11590–91; I do not know why I was sold, and I do not know what will become of me]), but she ends up as master of language and Tristan's equal, if not even superior, in terms of love and in terms of the community of the noble heart. After all, the narrator indicates this himself by means of the chiasmic verse structure of lines 18467–68: "Tristandes leben und sîn tôt, / sîn lebender tôt, diu blunde Isôt" (Tristan's life and his death, his living death, the blond Isolde).

The same development cannot be claimed for Tristan, as he appears, almost from the point on after having completed his schooling, as fully accomplished and hardly in need of any outside helpers, whether with respect to intellectual and artistic issues, or with respect to politics and social questions. Significantly, Tristan is described as "lantlôse" (5868; [king] without land), which suggests his complete independence from political, material, and familial support, and also his ability to traverse the world without any concern about the various peoples. He also demonstrates enormous knightly skills, but he does not want to or cannot hold on to his own kingdom and instead completely orients himself toward Isolde's love. The more he and Isolde desperately try to get together under the watchful eyes of King Marke and his court, the more Tristan's power fades away, whereas Isolde's influence and skills rise along with her central role as the only true lover. This is intriguingly demonstrated through her growing command of communicative skills with which she successfully deceives the king and makes him believe that she really hates Tristan and would rather have the court steward as her protector (14206–07).

Gertrud Hermans was the first to observe the intriguing parallels to Hartmann's *Erec* where Enîte also resorts to lies in order to mislead the count who wants to kidnap her from Erec's side (3843–95).⁷⁸ These lies, however, reflect more than a growing awareness on her part of how to manipulate language in order to achieve her personal goals both on the political level and with respect to her love affair with Tristan. In fact, both Enîte and Isolde demonstrate that they have learned the fundamental lessons of the human language as the most powerful tool available

Intellektualität und Liebe oder die Suche nach dem Wesen der individuellen Existenz. Germanistische Bibliothek, Dritte Reihe: Untersuchungen und Einzeldarstellungen (Heidelberg: Winter, 1976).

⁷⁸ Gertrud Hermans, *List. Studien zur Bedeutungs- und Problemgeschichte*, Ph.D. thesis, Freiburg i. B., 1953, 204; here quoted from Gisela Hollandt, *Die Hauptgestalten in Gottfrieds Tristan. Wesenszüge, Handlungsfunktion, Motiv der List.* Philologische Studien und Quellen, 30 (Berlin: Schmidt, 1966), 128.

for members of the court. The more Isolde, for instance, knows how to employ language both in public (deceptive) and in her intimate relationship with Tristan (truthful),⁷⁹ the more the young queen also assumes center position in the entire romance.

Two important scenes shed significant light on Isolde's supreme role at Marke's court and in the life of her husband and her lover. First, when Isolde has to go through the ordeal to prove her innocence as Marke's wife, and second, almost at the end, when Isolde reflects upon Tristan's departure and on her own situation as the person left behind by her lover.

Turning to the ordeal first, here we observe that Isolde emerges as the true mastermind in this extraordinary court case, whereas Tristan simply performs the role that she has assigned to him: "si schreip unde sande / einen brief Tristande / und enbôt im, daz er kâeme, / swa er die vuoge nâeme" (15553–56; she wrote a letter to Tristan and asked him to come if it were possible for him). Whereas during the early phase of her marriage, Isolde had been made to a victim of the manipulations by the Irish knight Gandin and of King Marke's failure to defend his wife against outside challengers; fortunately for her, she was rescued by Tristan in the last minute from being kidnapped (13097–450). During that entire episode, the young queen seems to be completely passive and only cries over her destiny, which allows Tristan to employ his secret strategy of playing on his harp to offer the young queen some consolation. Once, however, Isolde has recognized her lover, she quickly joins his deceptive game and insists that she would allow only the harpist to take her to the ship on his horse (13400–01). Whereas here the young queen only knows how to join the rhetorical operation to deceive Gandin, later she will conceive of her own plans and assume the control over her own life, fooling King Mark and utilizing her lover Tristan to the best of her abilities. When Isolde is later accused of adultery and finally put to test with the hot iron, we suddenly discover in her a supremely sophisticated and intelligent member of the court who masterfully draws upon all registers available to her in staging a play through which she is able to defy her husband's challenges and to emerge as the one person truly in control of the entire court. Isolde requests Tristan to act the role of a poor and weak pilgrim who must carry her from the ship but then stumbles and falls down with her, allowing her later to swear that she never lay in the arms of any other man but her husband and this pilgrim (15560–605). Amazingly, as the narrator comments, God supports her and appears as malleable as a sleeve in the wind (15724–64). More important, however, proves to be the

⁷⁹ "ir beider sin, ir beider muot, / daz was allez ein und ein, / jâ und jâ, nein unde nein. / jâ unde nein, nein unde jâ / entriuwen daz was niender dâ. / an in was niht gescheiden" (13010–14). See also Rüdiger Schnell, *Suche nach Wahrheit: Gottfrieds "Tristan und Isolde" als erkenntniskritischer Roman*. Hermaea. Germanistische Forschungen, Neue Folge, 67 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992), 235–62.

court's reaction, and especially the response by King Marke, as the latter is more than anxious to accept Isolde's oath in the way as she had formulated it all by herself, whereas she successfully excludes all her enemies from determining the exact wording (15681–724). The more the various parties struggle against each other over the specific wording, the more the queen knows how to take charge of it herself. Though she insinuates that Marke would have to approve of her statement (15697–700), she really manipulates him and imposes her oath on him, demonstrating how much she is truly in charge of the entire scene, leaving no room for her husband to change any word (15724–26).

Whereas the Bishop and all other dignitaries fade away into the background during these complicated negotiations, Isolde emerges as the dominant figure and receives the highest authority possible, namely Christ's approval because she does not burn herself and thus can demonstrate publicly that she is not guilty of adultery, irrespective of the truth to the contrary: "dâ wart wol g'offenbaeret / und al der werlt bewaeret, / daz der vil tugenthafte Crist / wintschaffen also ein ermel ist" (15733–36; it was revealed and demonstrated to the world that the most virtuous Christ is like a sleeve blown by the wind). By contrast, her own husband hardly manages to get his own words in and has always others speak for him. For instance, although the two courtly spies Marjodo and Melot do not seem to enjoy the greatest respect and only serve King Marke for his personal purposes, they do act and speak for the King and the court as a whole, as Isolde's beauty has dazzled, that is, also blinded, the entire company.

We do not know how many knights, aside from Tristan, are in love with Isolde, but Gandîn's appearance early in the romance indicates the degree to which the erotic tension structures the relationship between Isolde and the men at King Marke's court. Not surprisingly, the ordeal is observed by the entire court, both because of its powerful religious and political significance and because of Isolde's erotic influence which she wields.⁸⁰ To this we now can add her supreme communicative and rhetorical skills with which she knows how to manipulate the court and the church.

Insofar as she triumphs over all her trials and tribulations, Isolde also triumphs over the entire court and emerges as its absolute master. Significantly, at this point even her own lover, Tristan, follows her commands and assumes just a secondary role. Many scholars have viewed this entire scene in very mixed light. Peter Thurlow argues that by "practicing *wîpliche güete* and giving herself [Isolde – A.C.] to one fortunate man, *ein saelec man*, she can grant him an earthly paradise of

⁸⁰ In some *Tristan* versions, such as in Béroul's, King Marke threatens to punish Isolde for her adulterous acts by handing her over to the lepers. These, because of their sickness, stand on a very low social level, but their sexual voluptuousness and their desire for Isolde represents the entire male court.

mutual love.”⁸¹ Annette Volting, by contrast, opines that Isolde loses her self-discipline and falls prey to lust when she desires Tristan’s love more than anything else in her life: “consequently she slips out of the ranks of ideal women.”⁸² Ann Marie Rasmussen assumes that the ordeal-scene only concerns King Marke’s and Isolde’s public honor which is endangered by the rumors about the illicit love affair.⁸³ Christoph Huber goes so far as to argue that Isolde is subjugated to one of the most brutal court systems in the Middle Ages, which he even equates with the Inquisition; in particular he bemoans the fact that she has no defense against the ordeal imposed on her simply because the rumors and suspicions incriminate too much.⁸⁴ All these rather traditional perspectives, which place too much emphasis on Isolde’s alleged passivity and alleged victimization, need to be reassessed.

Intriguingly, from this point on in the narrative, the romance experiences a dramatic reversal in the character constellation, as the female protagonist increasingly demonstrates, just as in Hartmann’s romance, that knightly virtues and other typically male features by themselves exert far less influence than diplomacy, communication, and political machinations—skills, in other words, that require much more intellectual and also emotional approaches than brute physical force.⁸⁵ Moreover, in terms of the love experience, Isolde soon outshines Tristan in spiritual strength and has to remind him of the basis of their mutual love. In Rasmussen’s words, “Though the Irish seneschal deemed fickleness a woman’s trait, it is Tristan who is inconstant when he marries Isolde of the White Hand.”⁸⁶ Although it is not true that Tristan marries the other Isolde—the text breaks off before Tristan has made the crucial decision—the male protagonist begins to waffle and fails in his traditionally self-disciplined and rational operations because love pains confuse his mind. The very opposite is the case with Isolde the Fair who powerfully represents, as Ernst Dick has pointed out, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, that is, she assumes the function of a “one-time

⁸¹ Peter Thurlow, “Gottfried and Minnesang,” *German Life and Letters* 48, 3 (1995): 401–12; here 407.

⁸² Annette Volting, “Gottfried’s *huote* excursus (*Tristan* 17817–18114),” *Medium Ævum* 67, 1 (1998): 85–103; here 98.

⁸³ Ann Marie Rasmussen, “The Female Figures in Gottfried’s *Tristan und Isolde*,” *A Companion to Gottfried von Strassburg’s “Tristan”*, ed. Will Hasty. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, NY, and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2003), 137–57; here 152.

⁸⁴ Christoph Huber, *Gottfried von Strassburg: Tristan*. Klassiker-Lektüren, 3 (Berlin: Schmidt, 2000), 93. For a detailed analysis of the ordeal and its historical-legal background, see Rosemary Norah Combridge, *Das Recht im ‘Tristan’ Gottfrieds von Strassburg*. Philologische Studien und Quellen, 15. 2nd ed. (Berlin: Schmidt, 1964), 83–120.

⁸⁵ Karina Kellermann, “und vunden vür ir herren da einen zestucketen man. Körper, Kampf und Kunstwerk im ‘Tristan’,” *Der ‘Tristan’ Gottfrieds von Strassburg*, 2000, 131–52.

⁸⁶ Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, transl. entire for the first time. With the surviving fragments of the *Tristan* of Thomas. With an Introduction by A. T. Hatto (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), 42

apotheosis."⁸⁷ Considering the premise of Gottfried's entire romance, formulated in his prologue, Isolde truly joins the community of the noble hearts. These are those people, as the poet emphasizes, who are strong enough to sustain deepest love pangs and know how to accept suffering with the calmness of a philosopher in return for the highest reward in life: love. "ein ander werlt die meine ich, / diu samet in eime herzen treit / ir süeze sûr, ir liebez leit, / ir herzeliep, ir senede nôt, / ir liebez leben, ir leiden tôt, / ir lieben tôt, ir leidez leben" (58–63). A. T. Hatto offers the best translation of these lines: "I have another world in mind which together in one heart bears its bitter-sweet, its dear sorrow, its heart's joy, its love's pain, its dear life, its sorrowful death, its dear death, its sorrowful life."⁸⁸ Significantly, this is the very community among the members of which Isolde now can be counted; she has triumphed in this life because of her love and because of her willing embrace of death for her love.

King Marke, although he indirectly knows of Tristan's and Isolde's love for each other, allows both to stay at his court even after he has observed them in the love cave, since he actually depends on them for his own happiness.⁸⁹ The narrator underscores how much Marke is tortured by what he witnesses every day: "der wiste ez wârez also den tôt / und sach wol, daz sîn wîp Isôt / ir herzen unde ir sinne / an Tristandes minne / mitalle was vervlizzen. / und enwolte es doch niht wizzen" (17747–52), and he blames his suffering on "geluste unde gelange" (17767; lust and desire). Subsequently, however, Gottfried offers a lengthy discussion of the nature of women, beginning with some traditional misogynistic statements, but then leads on to a glorious defense of women as they can offer men absolute happiness in this life, and are the source of virtue and ennoblement. As C. Stephen Jaeger observes, "'Honor' and 'praise' are attainable in tragic love through the magic of predestination, not through discipline and education."⁹⁰ If a woman dedicates herself and her honor to a man, he won't have to ask for anything else to gain endless joy (18099–114). In other words, Gottfried here projects an impressive ideal of womanhood that proves to be the very opposite to traditional, especially clerical, misogyny, insofar as the honorable and loving woman is equated with the ultimate life-giving source. As Christoph Huber has observed,

⁸⁷ Ernst S. Dick, "Gottfried's Isolde: Coincidentia Oppositorum?," *Tristania* 12, 1–2 (1986–1987): 15–24; here 18.

⁸⁸ Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, transl. entire for the first time. With the surviving fragments of the *Tristan* of Thomas. With an Introduction by A. T. Hatto (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), 42.

⁸⁹ King Marke might well be regarded as a truly tragic figure, and not as a male fool, as scholarship has liked to describe him. After all, he truly loves Isolde, and also would like to have his nephew around, but he has no place in their community and can only ask them not to show their love for each other too openly. See my study "König Marke in Gottfrieds von Straßburg *Tristan*: Versuch einer Apologie," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 35 (1992): 37–63.

⁹⁰ C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 196.

"Nur die mit sich selbst versöhnte Frau ist fähig, in vollkommener Minne ihrem Geliebten zu begegnen und darüber hinaus die Minne der ganzen Welt herauszufordern."⁹¹ C. Stephen Jaeger claims equal rank for Tristan and Isolde, suggesting that their ennobling love provides them with "superiority, virtue, aristocracy," though "removed to an inner realm, and public acts and performances aim at concealing, not revealing the love sheltered within."⁹² But we will see that there are remarkable differences between the two lovers, and that Isolde emerges as the truly heroic character, whereas Tristan loses his track, gets confused, and fails to distinguish between his heart-felt love for Isolde the Fair and his visually-conditioned love for Isolde Of the White Hand.

Altogether, as to be expected, tragedy looms large for Tristan and Isolde because her marriage to Marke makes it impossible for them to achieve this utopia of love.⁹³ Once the king has finally discovered them in intimate embrace, Tristan has to depart for good, whereas Isolde stays behind as the truly tragic figure. Gottfried allows her to speak once more, and here we discover how much the speaking woman stands in the center of the literary account. All previous events and actions now culminate in Isolde's reflections.

Tristan, almost like his father Rivalin, is immediately prepared to leave without particular concern for his beloved, Isolde (18265–85), although he still begs her to keep him in her heart. She has to remind him, however, that their heart and mind have already merged too much and can no longer simply forget each other (18290–91). More important, the poet grants her much more space than Tristan to discuss her own love and its significance for both of them. In particular, she is concerned that he might fall in love with another woman (18300) and hands him a ring as a constant reminder of her love for him. Not content with this gift, however, she also impresses on Tristan how much pain this separation will cause them both, and begs him not to forget the many hours of common suffering on behalf of their love: "gedenket maneger swaeren zît, / die ich durch iuch erliten hân, / und lâit iu nieman nâher gân / dan Isolde, iuwer vriundîn!" (18318–21; remember the many difficult times when I had to suffer for you, and do not let any other person come close [to your heart] but Isolde, your beloved). Whereas Tristan had emphasized primarily their past happiness and then expressed his worry that his departure might diminish her love for him (18269–70; 18280–82), Isolde points out the dialectical nature of their love, the interlacing of joy and happiness, and the everlasting power of love (18323–27), thereby returning to the fundamental concept developed by Gottfried himself in the prologue to this romance.

⁹¹ Christoph Huber, *Gottfried von Straßburg*, 115: Only the woman who has found harmony in herself is capable to respond to her lover with complete love and, further, to elicit the love of the entire world.

⁹² C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*, 195–97; especially 196.

⁹³ Tomas Tomasek, *Die Utopie*, 187–99.

Not surprisingly, Isolde is the last one to speak and to reflect upon their relationship, and she summarizes in most eloquent terms the fundamental principles of love between them. Long gone is the time when Tristan had to teach her the basics of diplomatic talk, rhetoric, the liberal arts, and hence the language of love. Indeed, Tristan's former student has turned into his own master—a significant role reversal which has also been observed in the case of Heloise in her relationship with Abelard, a fascinating model case which Gottfried obviously drew from for his poetic treatment of his love story.⁹⁴

In remarkable contrast to Isolde's triumphant display of her noble heart, deeply informed by the experience of suffering, loneliness, and love, Tristan seems to be much more concerned with his social standing in her estimation and expresses his fear that his beloved might forget him (18280–82). In contrast, Isolde discusses the philosophical basis of their mutual love and emphasizes how much her own life depends on his life, as his death would also necessitate her own death. Isolde definitely rises in stature here and becomes the poet's mouthpiece when she states that their love and their life are one and the same (18344), a direct echo of the narrator's words in the prologue. Tristan had plainly concluded his speech with a request for a kiss and the permission to leave her (18285), but Isolde goes one step further and reconfirms their love as a mutual bond of the profoundest kind, as there are only one Tristan and one Isolde in this world (18358).

The subtle shift in focus from Tristan to Isolde is also revealed through the subsequent events. Whereas Tristan travels the world and tries to cope with his deep melancholy, Isolde stays behind and is given another opportunity to deliver a lengthy speech in which she expresses her love, pain, and utmost longing for Tristan. This might well be the most important monologue in the entire romance, as Isolde formulates in multiple and ever new images the dialectics of love and the enormous pain resulting from Tristan's departure.

In 109 verses Isolde expresses, in her own words, what the impact and consequences of true love are, how true love and life are intimately intertwined, and what the separation from Tristan really means for her. However, Isolde develops her inner thought process further and moves away from her own pain and suffering to Tristan's destiny. She realizes that he really had to depart from her to preserve his life. Isolde then accepts her own love pains and welcomes Tristan's leaving because she would not have wanted to endanger him and now prefers her suffering over his death. Most important, she suddenly understands

⁹⁴ C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*, 196: "Unfailing devotion to a love given in full knowledge that the love destroys the lovers is the formula that links Tristan and Isolde with Heloise." See also my study "Abaelards *Historia Calamitatum*, der Briefwechsel mit Heloise und Gottfrieds von Straßburg *Tristan*: Historisch-biographische und fiktionale Schicksale. Eine Untersuchung zur Intertextualität im zwölften und dreizehnten Jahrhundert," *Arcadia* 35, 2 (2000): 225–53.

that true love is altruistic and would betray itself if it were solely aimed at winning personal advantages at the cost of the beloved: “wan weizgot swer ze sînem vromen / mit sînes vriundes schaden wil komen, / der treit im cleine minne” (18589–91; by God, he who thinks only of his own profit at his friend’s expense bears very little love for him). Significantly, Isolde realizes that for her to love means to think of the other in the first place, and of oneself only afterwards. Consequently she is ready to force herself to accept the pain of his departure and to suffer from her unfulfilled love (18597–600).

Although Gottfried does not break off at this point and instead has Tristan, following the older literary traditions, encounter Isolde of the White Hand who deeply confuses his feelings, the monologue of the Irish Princess Isolde truly represents the conceptual conclusion of the love story. This convincingly explains the unsatisfactory and fragmentary ending almost thousand lines later.⁹⁵ Here Tristan tries to convince himself that Marke’s wife no longer loves him, otherwise she would have searched for him far and wide: “und ich iu niht sô maere bin, / daz ir mich sît haetet besant / und eteswaz umbe mîn leben erkant. / si mich besande? â waz red ich?” (19506–09; you do not love me enough to search for me to find out about my life. She would have searched for me? What am I saying?). Although he still deeply longs for her, he sees no alternative for himself but to accept Isolde of the White Hand’s love and perhaps to marry her, as we know it from other versions (Béroul, Thomas, Eilhart, etc.).

Whereas Isolde the Fair had accepted eternal suffering as the basis of her love for Tristan (18596), Tristan calculates his chances for a new love in terms of past, present, and future, that is, he realizes that the time has come for him to embark on a new enterprise and woo Isolde Whitehand (19466–75). But the narrator clearly states that Tristan suffers from erotic confusion and basically deceives both women: “sus was er beider irre. / er wolde unde enwolde / Isolde unde Isolde” (19388–90; thus he got confused with both of them, he desired Isolde and did not desire Isolde).

⁹⁵ Victor Millet, “Liebe und Erinnerung,” 2002, still tries to rescue Tristan as an admirable lover who preserves his true love for Isolde the Fair through his memory, but he does not pay enough attention to the actual words uttered by Tristan who complains about being without any consolation and being abandoned by his old love. In particular, Tristan even accuses Isolde of enjoying love with King Marke (19484), whereas he lives in the foreign world as a stranger. In fact, Tristan encourages himself to turn all his attention to the new Isolde and to give up on his old love (19465–66). As to the fragmentary conclusion, see my article “Der Text der nie enden will. Poetologische Überlegungen zu fragmentarischen Strukturen in mittelalterlichen und modernen Texten,” *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 99: *Anfang und Ende*, ed. Wolfgang Haubrichs [1995]: 83–113. Cf. now Alexander Kolerus, *Aula memoriae: Zu Gestalt und Funktion des Gedächtnisraums im Tristan Gottfrieds von Straßburg und im mittelhochdeutschen Prosa-Lancelot*. Mikrokosmos, 74 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2006), 52–54.

Certainly, just as in Enîte's case in Hartmann's romance, neither nominal nor physical power shifts from the male members of the court to the women. Both Erec and Tristan hold on to or rather preserve their public esteem, honor, and rank as rulers of their people (with or without land). Nevertheless, Enîte and Isolde equally gain a significant position in the life of their husband and lover respectively and of the entire court. Neither Erec nor Tristan succeed in living up to the ideal of love, although the former is given a second chance and recovers his previous position with Enîte's help. Tristan is forced to depart from his beloved Isolde and never makes any attempt to return to her or to find any other way to meet her in secret. He triumphs as a knight again, yet he loses all his happiness and is incapable of committing himself to the one love he had sworn to.

This finds its significant expression Tristan's travel toward the east, away from Cornwall, and there he comes across the second Isolde. He had found his true love in the west, where Isolde the Fair was identified as the bright sun (9456),⁹⁶ but now Tristan has reversed, metaphorically speaking, the natural course of the celestial bodies and regressed in his own nature as the star of the entire courtly world. In this sense Isolde the Fair plays a different role than Enîte, as she loses Tristan, but like Enîte she demonstrates her superior strength of love in face of almost certain death. Enîte courageously displays her love when she warns Erec over and over again of imminent dangers despite his ban on her speech. Isolde emerges as the true lover as well when she speaks, both during the good-bye scene with Tristan and later in her monumental monologue.⁹⁷

Each woman in her own terms demonstrates the significant roles they play in the world of the courts. Physical threats, seduction attempts, and rejections have no bearing on them, instead they pursue the path of love against all real and potential dangers. Enîte, for instance, is undaunted by the threats of severe beating, if not killing first by Erec, then by Count Oringles, and Isolde has to undergo the terrible test of an ordeal. The former resorts to shrieking and yells for help, waking up Erec from his seeming death; the latter manipulates the entire court with her strategy of having Tristan act as an old and weak pilgrim and then swears a highly dubious oath which finds King Marke's and even God's agreement, allowing her to escape the test of her marital loyalty unscathed.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ For further astronomical references identifying Isolde, her mother, and Brangaene, see Clifton D. Hall, *A Complete Concordance to Gottfried von Strassburg's Tristan* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 171 (morgenrot), 232 (sunne), 273 (volmaene).

⁹⁷ Alois Wolf, *Gottfried von Strassburg und die Mythe von Tristan und Isolde* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), 240.

⁹⁸ Wolfgang Schild, "Das Gottesurteil der Isolde. Zugleich eine Überlegung zum Verhältnis von Rechtsdenken und Dichtung," *Alles was Recht war. Rechtsliteratur und literarisches Recht. Festschrift für Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Hans Höfinghoff, Werner Peters, et al. *Mediävistische Studien*, 3 (Essen: Item, 1996), 55–75.

Certainly, the differences between Enîte and Isolde and their particular situations cannot be ignored either, but both women demonstrate remarkable strength and enormous influence at court, that is, within male-dominated society because of their superior strength as lovers. Patriarchy as such, if we want to call courtly society by that name, continues to hold sway, at least nominally. Both Hartmann and Gottfried, however, suggest, through the portrayal of their female protagonists, that women's words and actions also play a major role and deeply influence the lives of their husbands and lovers. These women do not necessarily break the formal deadlock of patriarchal society, as they do not succeed in gaining access to public power. But they undoubtedly demonstrate the far-reaching consequences of their words spoken both in public and in private and illustrate their superior intelligence and wisdom in difficult political situations. Neither Enîte nor Isolde assume actual control in the respective romances, but they defy the traditional concept of the helpless damsel in distress who entirely depends on the male lover to rescue her from various kinds of dangers normally symbolizing women's physical, emotional, and intellectual weakness. The opposite seems to be the case in these two Middle High German courtly romances, whether these characters continue to live under patriarchal rule or not.

This observation could also be expanded to many other noble ladies in contemporary courtly romances. Examples would be Belacane, Herzloyde, and Ampflise in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, Gyburc in his *Willehalm*, the various ladies in The Stricker's *Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal*, Queen Ginover and Amurfinia in Heinrich von dem Türlin's *Diu Crône*, to name just a few.⁹⁹ Admittedly, the male authors ultimately favor their male protagonist and at first sight focus primarily on their chivalric struggles, their amorous adventures, and also their internal conflicts. Insofar, however, as the courtly romances reflect the chivalric world *in toto*, where women enjoy the same respect and often also the same authority, it is little wonder that we quickly discover the true extent to which women also play a significant, sometimes even the dominant role. They establish their influence not through chivalric deeds, not through acts of violence or by way of political struggles. Instead, women's public roles are determined by their skillful application of persuasion, by their intelligent strategies in handling the various demands on them and expectations of them as courtly ladies, and with the

⁹⁹ For new perspectives on women's active role in the history of medieval German literature, see Claudia Spanily, *Autorschaft und Geschlechterrolle: Möglichkeiten weiblichen Literatentums im Mittelalter. Tradition – Reform – Innovation*, 5 (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2002); Ann Marie Rasmussen, "Reason and the Female Voice in Walther von der Vogelweide's Poetry," *Medieval Woman's Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches*, ed. Anne L. Klinck and Ann Marie Rasmussen. The Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 168–86. See also Alexandra Sterling-Hellenbrand, *Topographies of Gender in Middle High German Arthurian Romance Author(s)*. Studies in Medieval History and Culture (New York: Garland, 2001).

help of sensitive, particularly trustworthy communication. Their's is the power of the weak, but it is a power all men in the courtly romances have to deal with. Intriguingly, the more the narrative focus seems to rest on the male protagonists, the more we discover, through careful analysis of the words uttered on the sideline, how much the world of the courts were, indeed, influenced, if not controlled by, individual noble ladies.¹⁰⁰

In light of our analysis we can now fully concur with Jacqueline Murray's findings: "In medieval thought, despite the superficial appearance of a monovocal, clerical discourse of misogyny, the evaluation of gender was in fact diverse and complex. . . . In the search for an understanding of gender it is imperative to reject the simplistic and monovocalic and instead to revel in the complex, competing, and frequently discordant chorus of medieval women and men."¹⁰¹ To illustrate this, once again, with respect to Gottfried's *Tristan*, we are now justified to draw the following conclusion, here quickly expanding on the narrow focus pursued before: Rivalin, Tristan's father, would not have accomplished his goals and would not have achieved any fame without the critical role played by his beloved and later wife, Blanscheflur. The Irish King Gurmun would not have gained any respect if not for his enormous influential, highly circumspect, deeply learned, and extraordinarily diplomatically skilled wife Isolde. Tristan seems to be the exception, at first sight, because he apparently dominates the scene for a long time, enjoying political independence and the freedom of any familial bonds, if we disregard his uncle King Marke. Once, however, Isolde the Fair has achieved the highest level of learning both in intellectual matters and in intrapersonal relationships, she demonstrates to be the true role model and leader in their love affair because she seems to be the only one to fully understand the true implications of love, a love felt by those who possess a noble heart. Consequently, she stays behind in Cornwall as a most impressive tragic figure, unreservedly accepting the pain resulting from the disastrous outcome of her love affair with Tristan, and she does not get confused in her love for Tristan, especially when confronted with the magical dog Petitcreiu, a most serious challenge to her true dedication to her love for Tristan, whereas the latter, at the end when he

¹⁰⁰ For parallel cases in the Icelandic history, see *'The Fragility of Her Sex'? Medieval Irish Women in their European Context*, ed. C. E. Meek and M. K. Simms (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996); with regard to the *lais* of Marie de France, Marco D. Roman, "Reclaiming the Self Through Silence: The Riverside Counselor's Stories and the Lais of Marie de France," *Crossing the Bridge. Comparative Essays on Medieval European and Heian Japanese Women Writers*, ed. Barbara Stevenson and Cynthia Ho. The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 175–88, reaches the same conclusions.

¹⁰¹ Jacqueline Murray, "Thinking about Gender: The Diversity of Medieval Perspectives," *Power of the Weak. Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 1–26, here 16.

encounters Isolde of the White Hand, begins to waver and displays rather dubious instability in his commitment to his true love, the Irish princess.¹⁰²

Isolde thus proves to be a full member of the community of those who command of a 'noble heart.'

Certainly, Marke continues to rule his country, but he proves to be just a shadow of his own self, fully dependent on his love for his wife Isolde and his nephew Tristan, yet equally frustrated by both. Tristan, on the other hand, traverses the world, lost at sea, so to speak, getting confused with respect to his true love once he has encountered Isolde of the White Hand. He also suffers deeply from the separation of Isolde the Fair, but he seems very close at tergiversating and abandoning his original love that had filled his and Isolde's heart during their time together in Cornwall. At close examination, the term 'patriarchy' quickly loses all meaning both with regard to the political and social power structure, and to the relationship between the genders, not even to mention the dimension of love.

¹⁰² Tristan's decision to fight against the giant Urgân in order to gain the magical dog Petitcreiu leads him on to the slippery path toward confusion both in his love for Isolde and in his ability to comprehend his world (15765ff., or Book XXV). In as much as Tristan is not able to identify the actual color of the dog's fur, which has metaphoric significance for his general skill, or rather lack of skill, to operate on an epistemological level, he also does not understand the potentially devastating consequences of Petitcreiu on Isolde's love for him. Although the music of the bell around the dog's neck fills the listener with absolute happiness and makes him forget all his previous sorrow and suffering, Tristan sends the dog to his beloved. Isolde, however, who realizes the illusionary character of this deceitful dog, tears off the bell and refrains from acquiring artificial happiness without Tristan, demonstrating thereby that she has gained a deeper understanding of love than Tristan: "solt ich âne in nu lebende sîn / vrô unde vrôudebaere / und daz er trûric waere?" (16382-84; should I live without him and be happy and filled with joy, while he is sorrowful?). Indeed, she reveals her truly noble heart by accepting the pain resulting from Tristan's absence in return for staying loyal to her lover. Significantly, neither Rüdiger Krohn, vol. 3: *Kommentar, Nachwort und Register*, 1980, nor Lambertus Okken, *Kommentar zum Tristan-Roman Gottfrieds von Strassburg*. Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur, 57 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1984), vol. 1, have anything to say about Isolde's action in this scene and ignore to credit her with one of the most impressive decisions in the world of the lovers. See also Werner Schröder, "Das Hündchen Petitcreiu im Tristan Gottfrieds von Straßburg," *Dialog. Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft im Zeichen deutsch-französischer Begegnung. Festgabe für Josef Kunz*, ed. Rainer Schönhaar (Berlin: Schmidt, 1973), 32-42; Aaron E. Wright, "Petitcreiu: A Text-Critical Note to the Tristan of Gottfried von Strassburg," *Colloquia Germanica* 25, 2 (1992): 112-21. Uta Drecolli, *Tod in der Liebe – Liebe im Tod: Untersuchungen zu Wolframs "Titulei" und Gottfrieds "Tristan" in Wort und Bild* (Frankfurt a. M., et al.: Peter Lang, 2000), 225, recognizes in Petitcreiu nothing but a marker for the lovers who are on their way toward the love cave: "Die Liebenden können nach der Begegnung mit dem *hundelin* ihren Weg gemeinsam fortsetzen, sowohl in äußerer, (sic) als auch in innerer Nähe." She does not observe how much Tristan is about to mislead Isolde with this wonder dog that has the effect of a drug on those who listen to the music created by the bell. And she also does not realize that Isolde's action, tearing off the bell, demonstrates that she has gained the deepest understanding of love, whereas Tristan is about to lose it. See now my study "Female Agency and Power in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan: The Irish Queen Isolde: New Perspectives*," *Tristania* 23 (2005): 39-60.

Gottfried's true genius as a poet comes to fore through his intricate treatment of this new type of relationship where women and men enjoy surprisingly equal status and where the key issue, as it turns out, has nothing to do with the public roles assumed by the protagonists, but everything with courtly love, honor, and inner strength with which the lovers manage to sustain the dialectics of sorrow and joy in love. Considering all three criteria, Isolde the Fair unequivocally emerges as the supreme figure in the entire romance, tragic in her final good-bye speech, but truly heroic in her ability to love and to live with the resulting love pains. Isolde's final words clearly signify how much inner strength she has acquired, and how much she comes closest to the ideals of those with a 'noble heart': "ich wil mich gerne twingen / an allen mînen dingen, / daz ich mîn unde sîn entwese, / durch daz er mir und ime genese" (18597–600; I will happily force myself in every respect to renounce both him and myself so that he will stay alive for myself and himself).

This observation might not have a direct bearing on the political status of medieval women at the courts, but we can draw the crucial insight from this narrative development that Gottfried paid Isolde the Fair the highest respect and suggested that her tragic heroism elevated her in ethical and erotic terms far above the male protagonists, which would have a far-reaching impact on the gender discourse within the courtly world and beyond.

Chapter Three

Women's Secular and Spiritual Power in the Middle Ages. Two Case Studies: Hildegard von Bingen and Marie de France¹

Women's Power in the Middle Ages

As Jerold C. Frakes asserts in his provocative study *Brides and Doom*, "[t]he power to which women—even of the royal class—had access, however, was with very few exceptions based in the household itself and their role in that domestic unit."² With regard to money and political power wielded by individuals in the Middle High German epic *Nibelungenlied*, Frakes unequivocally states: "Nonetheless, it is the men who decide, allow, prevent, countermand, overrule, distribute, and receive the distributed money."³ Of course, there are many counterexamples, even within the world of heroic epics, such as *Kudrun*, but Frakes dismisses those strong women in this epic who take actions into their own hand and determine the history of their peoples because both Hilde and Kudrun "simply reinforce the codes of conventional male political behavior, including the unquestioned patriarchal dominance over females."⁴ Eva Parra Membrives suggests that a close analysis of courtly romances, especially of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, would reveal the true extent to which the patriarchal system—the Arthurian court and, implicitly, also the Church, and both dominated by men, either the knights

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Judith R. Rothschild, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, for her critical reading of this chapter. Constant J. Mews, Monash University, Melbourne, was also so kind to provide some valuable comments.

² Jerold C. Frakes, *Brides and Doom. Gender, Property, and Power in Medieval German Women's Epic. Middle Ages Series* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 55.

³ Frakes, *Brides and Doom*, 83.

⁴ Frakes, *Brides and Doom*, 259.

or the clerics—controlled women's lives and did not tolerate any alternative form of existence representative of and adequate for women.⁵ When it comes to mother-daughter relationships as reflected in literary documents, Ann Marie Rasmussen assumes that irrespective of the context, genre, or cultural and economic conditions, we are always faced by "vexed and contradictory, yet historically specific, scripts through which patriarchal ideals of womanhood take shape."⁶

More recent scholarship, however, has pointed out Kudrun's remarkable diplomatic skills in controlling the dangerous patterns of heroic male actions which threaten to destroy all political structures.⁷ Kerstin Schmitt, for instance, underscores the dramatic "Versöhnungspolitik, an der die Frauenfiguren entscheidend beteiligt sind" (politics of conciliation in which female figures are decisively involved),⁸ but rarely do such apologetic approaches lead to a thorough examination of women's actual power in medieval society; especially of power in terms of individual influence, self-assertion, the ability to voice public opinions, and to join the major discourse. Art historical research mostly refers back to the fundamental paradigm of Eve and Mary—sinner and redeemer—but even the role played by the latter did not do much to improve the social status of medieval women in real life, as we are often told by feminist scholars.⁹ Nevertheless, numerous women, particularly nuns in the many convents that existed throughout the Middle Ages, turned toward artistic production, either weaving, painting,

⁵ Eva Parra Membrives, "Alternative Frauenfiguren in Wolframs *Parzival*: Zur Bestimmung des Höfischen anhand differenzierter Verhaltensmuster," *German Studies Review* 25, 1 (2002): 35–55. She focuses, above all, on women's "Fremdheit," or 'difference' from the male sphere of influence, but neglect considering how women operate within the courtly system. Only the comparison of women's with men's roles on the same plane allows us to gain a solid understanding of Wolfram's and any other poet's concept of the fundamental gender relations.

⁶ Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters in Medieval German Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 25. In her conclusion, Rasmussen differentiates this perspective, but also confirms the absolute dominance of patriarchy, 224: "the dominant medieval social order, which asserted in multiple ways the dominance of men and the subordination of women, was in fact a diffuse, contradictory, and flexible set of institutionalized power relations." For a more thorough critique, see Albrecht Classen, "Mutter zu Tochter: Literarhistorische Betrachtungen zu einem feministischen Thema," *The German Quarterly* 75, 1 (2002): 71–87, and 75, 2 (2002): 159.

⁷ Barbara Newman, "Hildegard von Bingen: Visions and Validation," *Church History* 54 (1985): 163–75.

⁸ Kerstin Schmitt, *Poetik der Montage. Figurenkonzeption und Intertextualität in der "Kudrun"*. Philologische Studien und Quellen, 174 (Berlin: Schmitt, 2002), 256: "politics geared at establishing peace in which women are heavily involved."

⁹ Madeline H. Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages. Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 36–38, 135–36, et passim; for a more differentiated perspective, see Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary. Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); see also Glenda McLeod, *Virtue and Venom. Catalogs of Women from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1991), for Eve, see 50–52, 63 et passim; for Mary, see 13, 40, 92, 95, 106, and 132–33.

composing music, calligraphy, or writing poetry, and some of them successfully embraced political life.¹⁰ Literary examples are highly contradictory, and it depends mostly on the specific interpretation how to evaluate a woman's input on the political and economic conditions of her time.¹¹ Nevertheless, it is the literary document that challenges traditional viewpoints about women's rights and roles in medieval society, especially if composed by female authors who provided alternative perspectives and different avenues for women within a patriarchal world.¹²

Young wives seem to have had very little to say and were often subject to their fathers', husbands', and brothers' supreme privileges,¹³ whereas widows often emerge as highly powerful and vastly influential within their society.¹⁴ Nuns in a convent often appear to have been nothing but an anonymous mass, but individual abbesses and other female leaders of monastic communities often rose to enormous political and religious power, to wit Hrotsvit of Gandersheim,

¹⁰ *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy. A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, ed. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists. The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997); Albrecht Classen, "The Medieval Monastery as a 'Gesamtkunstwerk.' The Case of the 'Heideklöster' Wienhausen and Ebbsdorf," *Studi medievali* XLIII, II (2002): 503–34; Susan Marti, *Malen, Schreiben, Beten: Die spätmittelalterliche Handschriftenproduktion im Doppelkloster Engelberg* (Zurich: Zurich InterPublishers, 2002).

¹¹ See, for example, *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages. An Anthology of Feminist Approaches to Middle High German Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik*, 528 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991); Waltraud Fritsch-Rößler, *Finis Amoris. Ende, Gefährdung und Wandel von Liebe im hochmittelalterlichen deutschen Roman*. *Mannheimer Beiträge zur Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft*, 42 (Tübingen: Narr, 1999), describes most male protagonists in medieval courtly romances as unreliable and untrustworthy partners who tend to abandon or neglect their beloved or wives. This, however, seems to be a very selective reading that deliberately ignores many contrasting examples. Admittedly, many romances reflect on conflicts between man and woman, and often the male character abandons his responsibility, but the ultimate ideal proves to be the very opposite.

¹² For a solid historical analysis, see Edith Ennen, *Frauen im Mittelalter*. Third, rev. ed. (Munich: Beck, 1987); from a purely biographical standpoint, see *Frauen des Mittelalters in Lebensbildern*, ed. Karl Rudolf Schnith (Graz, Vienna, and Cologne: Styria, 1997); for the history of women in England, see Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women. A Social History of Women in England, 450–1500* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

¹³ *Young Medieval Women*, ed. Katherine J. Lewis, Noel James Menuge, and Kim M. Phillips (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Petra Kellermann-Haaf, *Frau und Politik im Mittelalter. Untersuchungen zur politischen Rolle der Frau in den höfischen Romanen des 12., 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts*. *Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik*, 456 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1986); Shulamit Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: a History of Women in the Middle Ages* (1983; London and New York: Routledge, 1990); Edith Ennen, *The Medieval Woman* (1984; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Albrecht Classen, "Witwen in der deutschen und europäischen Literatur des Mittelalters: Neue Perspektiven zu einem kulturhistorischen Thema," *Etudes Germaniques* 57, 2 (2002): 197–232.

Heloise, Hildegard von Bingen, and Herrad von Hohenburg.¹⁵ In other words, if we turn to the actual documents and reinvestigate the archives, many concrete figures emerge from the past who exerted considerable influence, who were deeply involved in the intellectual life of their time, and who intensively exchanged letters with the world outside of the convent walls.¹⁶

Despite many book-shelves filled with detailed studies about women in the Middle Ages, a host of fundamental questions continue to haunt us and escape easy answers as we have often not fully discriminated between the projection of women in theological, historical, literary, and artistic terms and actual women's roles. Some scholars go so far as to essentialize literary projections of women, studying their presentation using highly traditional lenses determined by patriarchy, as if all expressions of powerful men also signify the total subjugation of women (see Frakes). The example of historically verifiable Countess Yolande of Vianden in the eponymous romance (ca. 1293–1300), who radically fights against her parents and can eventually enforce her entrance into the women's convent of Marienthal, demonstrates that the opposite could have been the case as well.¹⁷

History is a process in the making, and our modern-day perception of the past vastly depends on the premises, selective filters, frameworks, and behavioral models established by us while approaching the past.¹⁸ Medieval misogyny and

¹⁵ *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim. Rara Avis in Saxonia? A Collection of Essays*, compiled and ed. Katharina M. Wilson. Medieval and Renaissance Monograph Series, VII (Ann Arbor: Medieval and Renaissance Collegium, 1987); Anna Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources*. Brepols Medieval Women Series (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Helmut Feld, *Frauen des Mittelalters. Zwanzig geistige Profile* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2000).

¹⁶ See, for example, the remarkable personality of Katharina Lemlin in Nuremberg, discussed by Britta-Juliane Kruse, "Eine Witwe als Mäzenin. Briefe und Urkunden zum Aufenthalt der Nürnberger Patrizierin Katharina Lemlin im Birgittenkloster Maria Mai (Maihingen)," *Literarische Leben. Rollenentwürfe in der Literatur des Hoch- und Spätmittelalters. Festschrift für Volker Mertens zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Matthias Meyer and Hans-Jochen Schiewer (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002), 465–506; Helmut Feld, "Mittelalterliche Klosterfrauen im Spannungsfeld von Kommunität und religiöser Individualität," *Das Eigene und das Ganze. Zum Individuellen im mittelalterlichen Religiosentum*, ed. Gert Melville and Markus Schürer. Vita regularis, 16 (Münster, Hamburg, and London: LIT, 2002), 621–50.

¹⁷ Angela Mielke-Vandenhouten, *Grafentochter–Gottesbraut. Konflikte zwischen Familie und Frömmigkeit in Bruder Hermanns "Leben der Gräfin Yolande von Vianden"*. Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur, 21 (Munich: Fink, 1998); for the date, 56–58; for the historical source, 162–63; for a host of highly fascinating examples from mystical literature, see Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, *My Secret is Mine. Studies on Religion and Eros in the German Middle Ages*. Studies in Spirituality, Supplements, 4 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000).

¹⁸ Bernd Schneidmüller, "Constructing the Past by Means of the Present: Historiographical Foundations of Medieval Institutions, Dynasties, Peoples, and Communities," *Medieval Concepts of the Past. Ritual, Memory, Historiography*, ed. Gerd Althoff, Johannes Fried, Patrick J. Geary (Washington, D.C., and Cambridge: German Historical Institute, Cambridge University Press,

gynophobia were indeed prevalent and dominated almost all aspects of life if we read that time period mostly through clerical, male filters.¹⁹ If we choose to accept the same paradigms as espoused by medieval chroniclers and clerical authors—virtually all male—then, in fact, we will quickly perceive that life in the Middle Ages was determined by men's actions, writings, thoughts, and decisions. If, however, we avoid the traditional orientation and accept all voices from that time period, including those allegedly on the margin, we will come across different conditions, alternative voices, oppositions to the dominant discourse, heretical dissonances, and a remarkably heterogeneous society in which women played a much more significant role than modern scholarship was willing to acknowledge.²⁰ In Caroline Walker Bynum's words, "In the period from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, in contrast to the early Middle Ages, positive female figures and feminine metaphors took a significant place in spirituality alongside both positive male figures and misogynist images of women."²¹

As Lisa M. Bitel now convincingly argues, "our modern construction of history has clouded our memory of women's early medieval past. We continue to study what the tribal historians wrote, although we know that they forgot to bring along their women."²² Very simply put, for example, many medieval queens were quite

2002), 167–92.

¹⁹ *Woman Defamed and Woman Defend: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires, with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); id. *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages*. *Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 129–58, approaches her topic from a typical perspective, questioning "why women were held to be more vulnerable than men to this particular disruption of identity Women, in short, were considered to have a weaker claim to deictic integrity than men, a less sharply bounded self. This debility, in turn, rendered them more prone to spiritual influences and invasions." (130). But Caciola only investigates the majority opinion (clerical), and ignores, though for good reasons within the context of her study, alternative approaches, that is, women's resistance to male dominance, and, above all, women's intellectual, emotional, and spiritual influence on men.

²⁰ Friedrich Heer, *The Medieval World. Europe 1100–1350*, transl. from the German by Janet Sondheimer (1961; New York: The New American Library, 1962), 317–23, expresses great doubt about women's fair treatment by men, but also points out the highly complex conditions which prohibit us from making sweeping statements for women in all social classes at all medieval periods; for rich source material on heretics and outsiders, see also R. I. Moore, *The Birth of Popular Heresy*. *Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching* (1976; Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, Medieval Academy of America, 1995); *Other Middle Ages. Witnesses at the Margins of Medieval Society*, ed. Michael Goodich. *The Middle Ages Series* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

²¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, ". . . And Woman His Humanity": Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages," *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell, and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 257–88; here 258.

²² Lisa M. Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe, 400–1100*. *Cambridge Medieval Textbooks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 268.

capable of enforcing their own agenda and effectively pursued their personal ideals.²³ Nuns, abbesses, and other convent women all over Europe more or less determined the course of their own lives and deeply influenced their societies.²⁴ Urban women often worked side by side with their husbands, and similar phenomena can be observed in the world of the peasant class.²⁵ Even though the best known icon of medieval culture, the knight, seems to have assumed a highly privileged position, chivalry in its cultural manifestation was entirely dependent on the collaboration with the noble lady.²⁶ Admittedly, financial, legal, and physical power seems to have been mostly wielded by men, as the medieval world was by and large dominated by the heads of families—though even this generalization has recently come under attack because many women obviously served as moneylenders at least since the thirteenth century.²⁷ What, however, truly constitutes power, and do the silent or muted voices really count so little as not to be worthy of consideration by modern historians and literary historians?

In the present chapter I will examine what constitutes physical and spiritual power in both pragmatic and literary terms so as to gain a deeper insight in women's self-perception and self-representation as reflected in two major representatives of women's theology and literature.²⁸ For a comparative perspective, I will examine statements by the famous Benedictine Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179) and the Anglo-Norman writer Marie de France (flourishing around 1170–1180). Both represent highly exceptional figures, it seems, but they also constituted role models, allowing us, by examining their lives and writings,

²³ *Frauen des Mittelalters in Lebensbildern*, ed. Karl Schnith (Graz, Vienna, and Cologne: Verlag Styria, 1997); Margaret Wade Labarge, *A Small Sound of the Trumpet: Women in Medieval Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

²⁴ Edith Ennen, *Frauen im Mittelalter*. Dritte, überarbeitete Aufl. (1984; Munich: Beck, 1987), 75–86.

²⁵ *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); *Medieval Women in their Communities*, ed. Diane Watt (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1997); for an excellent document collection, see *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe. A Sourcebook*, ed. Emily Amt (New York and London: Routledge, 1993); for late-medieval examples pertaining to the new profession of book printers, see Albrecht Classen, "Frauen als Buchdruckerinnen im deutschen Sprachraum des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts," *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* 75 (2000): 181–95.

²⁶ See, for example, Edith Ennen, *Frauen im Mittelalter*, 1987; *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler, Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1988); *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages*, ed. Judith M. Bennett et al. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989); *Power of the Weak. Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana an Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

²⁷ See William Chester Jordan, *Women and Credit in Pre-Industrial and Developing Societies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 20–24, 58–78.

²⁸ For the most recent research overview regarding women's literacy, see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "Analytical Survey 5: 'Reading is Good Prayer': Recent Research on Female Reading Communities," *New Medieval Literatures*, 5, ed. Rita Copeland, David Lawton, and Wendy Scase (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 229–97.

to draw new implications from the positions which they held for other women writers.

The purpose is not to suggest any possible connections between these two contemporary women, as their intellectual worlds were vastly set apart from each other. Moreover, although we are well informed about Hildegard's life and work, Marie's identity has not been fully established even today, and we need to rely on her literary works for further insights in her ideas, concepts, and perceptions of women's life.²⁹ Both women, however, help us in our investigation as they have been the subject of much and intensive research and prove to have been extraordinary spokespersons for women at large. Whereas Hildegard gained fame for her mystical visions, copied down, for instance, in her voluminous *Scivias*, her medical treatises, and her musical compositions, Marie is best known today for her Breton *lais*, her *fables*, and her *Espurgatoire Saint Patriz*.³⁰ In order to establish a common denominator for both women, I will examine their self-consciousness, their attitude toward their womanhood, and their use of writing as women within a patriarchal world. The guiding question will be how much power each of these two women was able to exercise, and by what means. In the case of Hildegard we can resort to her mystical writings and also related texts which reflect her social, political, and financial position within her world.³¹ In the case of Marie de France we will have to utilize a literary analysis to unearth how this female writer projected an image of herself through the development of her figures, mostly in her verse narratives, the *Lais*.³² Ultimately, however, the texts of both female

²⁹ Albrecht Classen, "Marie de France," *Literary Encyclopedia* (online), 2003: <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=5494> (last accessed on Feb. 23, 2007).

³⁰ The literature on both Hildegard von Bingen and Marie de France is vast; for more recent critical studies, see Emanuel J. Mickel, *Marie de France*. Twayne's World Author Series, 306 (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974); Glyn S. Burgess, *The Lais of Marie de France. Text and Context* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1987); *Hildegard von Bingen. A Book of Essays*, ed. Maud Burnett McInerney. Garland Medieval Casebooks (New York and London: Garland, 1998); *Hildegard von Bingen in ihrem historischen Umfeld. Internationaler wissenschaftlicher Kongress zum 900jährigen Jubiläum, 13.–19. September 1998, Bingen am Rhein*, ed. Alfred Haverkamp (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2000). Whether Marie de France also composed *La vie seinte Audree*, as June Hall McCash, "La vie seinte Audree. A Fourth Text by Marie de France?," *Speculum* 77, 3 (2002): 744–77, suggests, cannot yet be fully confirmed, but her arguments in favor of Marie's authorship are quite convincing.

³¹ For secondary literature on Hildegard's relationship with her society, see *Hildegard von Bingen. Internationale wissenschaftliche Bibliographie*, unter Verwendung der Hildegard-Bibliographie von Werner Lauter, ed. Marc-Aeilko Aris, et al. Quellen und Abhandlungen zur mittelhochdeutschen Kirchengeschichte, 84 (Mainz: Mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte, 1998), 39–42.

³² Another excellent choice would have been Christine de Pizan, especially as she explicitly addresses the fundamental feminist issue of equality, women's defense, and women's lives. See Rosalind Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women. Reading Beyond Gender*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); for a rather critical review, see Albrecht Classen, in *Studi Medievali* XLII (2001): 271–74. Christine, however, has to be placed within the famous *querelle des dames*, and she represents such an exceptional case that our

writers promise to yield valuable information about how women perceived themselves and how much interest they had in realizing their own ideals and in establishing control of their lives, creating, as Joan M. Ferrante suggests, role models for other women as well.³³

Hildegard von Bingen

As has often been observed, Hildegard never hesitated to address the most respected and honored people of her time and to discuss with them both her visionary experiences and social, political, and moral issues concerning society at large. In 1146, for instance, she wrote a letter to the illustrious Bernard of Clairvaux and revealed to him some of her visions, asking for his advice in this definitely problematic situation.³⁴ Peter Dinzelbacher characterizes the relationship between both as highly disparate, insofar as Bernard was the most highly acclaimed preacher of his time, and Hildegard basically a non-entity, only serving as the magistra, or teacher, for a group of nuns in the small Benedictine convent, Disibodenberg near Mainz.³⁵ Joan M. Ferrante, on the other hand, signals the degree to which Hildegard, like other high-powered women such as Hrotsvita of Gandersheim, “can say anything with impunity, and she does. She takes on popes and emperors, telling them how they neglect their duties.”³⁶ The letter itself, however, sheds highly fascinating light on a woman’s strategy to make her words heard in public and to enter into a powerful theological discussion about her personal contacts with the Godhead.³⁷

Hildegard writes her letter at a crucial juncture in her life as she was about to divulge her visions to the world and would soon gain the highest respect for the

analysis might ultimately fail to convince the reader that she represented a wider section of medieval womanhood.

³³ Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex. Women’s Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts. Women of Letters* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1997), 139–74; very fittingly, she titled this chapter with “Women in Control.”

³⁴ Peter Dinzelbacher, *Bernhard von Clairvaux. Leben und Werk des berühmten Zisterziensers* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 1998), 311–13.

³⁵ Dinzelbacher, *Bernhard von Clairvaux*, 312.

³⁶ Joan [M.] Ferrante, “Public Postures and Private Maneuvers: Roles Medieval Women Play,” *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1988), 213–29; here 224.

³⁷ Letters have often served women to communicate with their environment and to establish a basis for their own intellectual lives. See Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex. Women’s Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts. Women of Letters* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 10–35; a most interesting case proves to be Heloise in her correspondence with Abelard, here 28–30, 44–46, et passim; see also *Listening to Heloise. The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler. *The New Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).

grace which God had bestowed upon her by Pope Eugenius III who was to acknowledge her status as a true visionary. The letter itself is well known and has often been studied because of its significance with respect to Hildegard's relationship with Bernard and with respect to her first public admission of visionary experiences.³⁸ Here I want to examine it in light of its documentary function reflecting upon the Magistra's assumption of political and intellectual power.³⁹

Hildegard's position vis-à-vis Bernard is one of humble submission and deep respect: "O uenerabilis pater B<ernarde>, qui mirabiliter in magnis honoribus uirtutis Dei" (3; "Venerable Father Bernard, you are held wonderfully in high honour by the power of God;" 3). She acknowledges his supreme standing near God and approaches him as a student or admirer, especially as she credits him with being "ualde metuendus es illicite stultitie huius mundi," (3; "a terror to the unlawful foolishness of the world;" 3). Although she seems to project her addressee as the highest paragon of Christian society, as a leader of the entire Church, she nevertheless does not hesitate contact him without any fear, asking him directly: "rogo te per Deum uiuum, ut audias me interrogantem te" (3; "Father, I ask you, by the living God, to attend to my question;" 3). Hildegard characterizes herself as "misera et plus quam misera in nomine femineo" (3; "miserable and more than miserable in my womanly existence;" 3), seemingly reconfirming long-standing misogynist statements so commonly voiced by male members of the Church since the time of the Desert Fathers.⁴⁰ But as soon as we follow the subsequent sentence, we immediately realize that Hildegard employs

³⁸ Ulrich Köpf, "Bernhard von Clairvaux in der Frauenmystik," *Frauenmystik im Mittelalter*, ed. Peter Dinzelbacher and Dieter R. Bauer. 2nd ed. (1985; Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 1990), 48–77.

³⁹ Here I quote from Hildegardis Bingensis, *Epistolarium*. Pars Prima, ed. L. van Acker. Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis, XCI, 2 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991). For the English translation, see Hildegard von Bingen, *Selected Writings*, transl. with an introduction and notes by Mark Atherton (London: Penguin, 2001), 3–5; significantly, many medieval women resorted to the genre of epistolarity as one of the few areas where female literacy was possible and not suppressed by male intellectuals, see Albrecht Classen, "Female Explorations of Literacy: Epistolary Challenges to the Literary Canon in the Late Middle Ages," *Disputatio. An International Transdisciplinary Journal of the Late Middle Ages*. Vol. 1: *The Late Medieval Epistle*, ed. Carol Poster and Richard Utz (Evanston, ILL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 89–121; Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex*, 34, observes, regarding some other letter collections: "All the poems Hildebert and particularly Baudri exchanged with their women friends and fellow poets suggest feelings of affection and shared delight in intellectual games, whatever other emotions may lie beneath the surface." This also applies to the letters exchanged between Hildegard and many different correspondents.

⁴⁰ For a solid text documentation, see *Woman Defamed and Woman Defend*, ed. An Anthology of Medieval Texts, ed. Alcuin Blamires, with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); see also Blamires's excellent *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

a highly skillful rhetorical strategy to prepare her reader for the enormity of what she is going to reveal.

Contrary to all expectations, she, as a woman, has been graced by a vision and has experienced the Godhead Himself: "ab infantia mea uidi magna mirabilia" (3; "[I] have seen great wonders since I was a child;" 3). Hildegard stresses the extraordinary quality of her revelation by adding an astonishing time coordinate. All her life she was a mystic, but she had never dared to talk about it, especially as she had no words available for the incredible experience: "lingua mea non potest proferre, nisi quod me docuit Spiritus Dei" (3; "and my tongue could not express them, if God's Spirit did not teach me to believe;" 3).⁴¹ Despite the aporia from which she had suffered, the time has come for her to express herself and turn into God's mouthpiece.⁴² The new words, however, with which she finally succeeded in breaking through to sharing her revelations were received by her from the Holy Spirit, a rather powerful claim for a woman in twelfth-century Germany.

Nevertheless, Hildegard humbles herself once again, characterizing herself, in comparison to Bernard, as "indigne famule tue" (3; "your unworthy servant;" 3), although we already know that she claims personal knowledge of the Godhead. In order to come to terms with her mystical vision, she requests that he examine himself for anything comparable which would allow him to teach her how to handle the situation. Putting in as a disclaimer her alleged inability to carry out any thorough "abscisione textus" (4; "textual analysis;" 4), Hildegard clearly signals that she would not encroach upon Bernard's territory of learned theology. Nevertheless, the mystical vision has shown her the way deep into Gospel by touching her "pectus meum et animam sicut flamma comburens, docens me hec profunda expositionis" (4; "heart and soul like a consuming fire, teaching me these profundities of exposition;" 4). Although she again asks Bernard for his help and support in these matters, which she characterizes as "exteriori materia" (4; "external;" 4), she insists on her own knowledge, which she acquired internally: "intus in anima mea sum docta" (4; "I am taught inwardly, in my soul;" 4). In other words, Hildegard claims the highest level of authority for her own divine knowledge, but she needs help and guidance in external matters. To strengthen her case, she gives praise to the Cistercian Abbot: "audiens de tua sapientia et de tua pietate consolabor" (4; "Hearing of your wisdom and piety I am comforted;" 4), yet she herself is filled with divine secrets and needs to divulge them with the

⁴¹ Udo Kühne, "Die Konstruktion prophetischen Sprechens. Hildegards Sicht der eigenen Rolle als Autorin," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 46 (1998): 67–78.

⁴² Hildegard's inability to formulate her mystical experiences was common among all medieval mystics, see Bruce Miley, *The Unspoken Word. Negative Theology in Meister Eckhart's German Sermons* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002).

public.⁴³ Although she appeals to Bernard for his help, the letter clearly indicates that she resorts to him only as a worldly authority who could serve her as a vehicle to communicate about her mystical visions to the public, both the Church and the laity.

In an intriguingly dialectical fashion, Hildegard casts herself as a timid person, but only because she needs Bernard to accept her cause and defend her in public to a probably incredulous Church audience: "ut hec dicam palam, aut habeam silentium" (4; "whether you want me to say these things openly or whether I should keep quiet;" 4). It does not really surprise us that Hildegard admits her insecurity in face of the startling visions: "magnum laborem habeo in hac uisione" (4; "For I have great trouble with this visionary gift;" 4), but this insecurity only pertains to the question whether the visions should be revealed to the ordinary people or not. In other words, Hildegard argues from a position of strength and expresses her jubilation as she has found in Bernard the right person to help her create a bridge between her internal cosmos and the external architecture. She proves to be a slightly hesitant prophet, though not because she feels insecure about her visions, but because she is not certain "quatenus dicam quod uidi et audiui" (4–5; "how much [she] should say of what [she has] seen and heard;" 4). Hildegard does not doubt her vision, she only questions whether any of her contemporaries would be able to understand her epistemologically extraordinary and stupefying account. Subsequently she resorts, once again, to a metaphorical self-characterization which conforms to traditional images of women's physical weakness and emotional instability: "ego sum mobilis cum motu in torculari arbore in natura mea, orta de radice surgente in Adam de suggestionem diaboli" (5; "I am unstable with the movement of the wooden beam of the wine-press in my nature, the beam which grew at the prompting of the devil from the root in Adam;" 4). In keeping with the general intention of her letter, Hildegard pleads with Bernard to assist her because he "erigens mundum in saluationem" (5; "raise[s] up the whole world to salvation;" 4). But she also admonishes the addressee not to remain passive and indifferent to her because she herself represents "the sacred sound, the power of the Father," and she would be able to lead him in his quest for divine knowledge as long as he is willing to pay attention to "uerbis istius hominis" (5; "the words of this correspondent;" 5). Consequently, her letter emerges as a significant document of Hildegard's clear awareness of the divine grace bestowed upon her which she wants to share with others as long as they acknowledge her and pay attention to her words.⁴⁴

⁴³ For further analysis of Hildegard's correspondence from a historian's point of view, see Fiona Maddocks, *Hildegard von Bingen: The Woman of Her Age* (New York et al.: Doubleday, 2001), 133–43.

⁴⁴ Franz J. Felten, "'Noui esse uolunt . . . deserentes bene contritam uiam . . .'" Hildegard von Bingen und Reformbewegungen im religiösen Leben ihrer Zeit," *Im Angesicht Gottes suche der Mensch sich selbst. Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179)*, ed. Rainer Berndt. *Erudiri Sapientia*, II (Berlin: Akademie

Hildegard quickly gained fame and great respect for her mystical visions, which then allowed her to assume also political power, as expressed in many of her subsequent letters.⁴⁵ Similarly as later mystics, such as Catherine of Siena and Birgitta of Sweden, the mystical experience lent itself for a tremendous role reversal, providing Hildegard with extraordinary influence. Peter Dinzelbacher analyzed a number of parallel cases but underscored their exceptionality within the patriarchal world of the medieval Church.⁴⁶ Indeed, as Hildegard's powerful rhetorical strategy reveals, only by means of extreme self-humbling could she hope for recognition. As our analysis of the letter to Bernard has demonstrated, however, the mystical experience provided her with considerably more than public acknowledgment, as Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff has suggested: "Visions led women to the acquisition of power in the world while affirming their knowledge of themselves as women."⁴⁷ She explains this by elaborating: "Her visions gave her strength to grow internally and to change the world, to build convents, found hospitals, preach, attack injustice and greed, even within the church."⁴⁸ In other words, mysticism lies at the heart of medieval gender debates, and the louder the female voices sounded, the more political power did these women gain. Certainly, the suprastructure of the medieval Church steadfastly remained male-dominated, but the emergence of the mystics proved to be highly problematic, destabilizing, and painfully challenging for the authorities.⁴⁹

In Hildegard's letter to Pope Eugenius III, written sometime between 1148 and 1153, we find solid confirmation for our observations, as the writer reasserts her position as a prophetic voice and claims public authority for herself: "Qui non silet, hec dicit propter imbecillitatem illorum. . . Quid dicit? Gladius radiat et circuit, occidens illos, qui praeue mentis sunt" ("He who is not silent speaks . . . And what does he say? The sword circles and turns, killing those who are evil in mind!")⁵⁰ In this case she does not address her personal concerns, instead she appeals to the Pope to assume boldly the position bestowed upon him by God: "O qui in tua persona es fulgens lorica et prima radix in nouis nuptiis Christi" (9; "You in your person are a shining breast-plate, the primary root, the presider at

Verlag, 2001), 27–86.

⁴⁵ See also Caroline Walker Bynum's study ". . . And Woman His Humanity," 280: "Women thus asserted and embraced their humanity. . . . To medieval women humanity was, most basically, not femaleness, but physicality, the flesh of the 'Word made flesh.'"

⁴⁶ Peter Dinzelbacher, *Mittelalterliche Frauenmystik* (Paderborn, Munich, et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1992), 251–60.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 6.

⁴⁸ Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, 6.

⁴⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption. Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 191 seq.

⁵⁰ Hildegardis Bingensis, *Epistolarium*, Pars Prima, 8–9; Hildegard, *Selected Writings*, 66.

Christ's nuptials with the Church;" 66). And: "Nunc, o tu, qui es in uice Christi sedens in cura ecclesiastice cathedre, meliorem partem tibi elige, ut aquila sis ursum superans" (9; "You now, the viceroy of Christ, seated on the throne of the Church, choose for yourself the better part, that you may be the eagle overcoming the bear;" 66). The epistolary author does not shy away from admonishing the highest representative of the Church to follow her advice and maintains a dialogic level of personal communication which would be truly unbelievable if women indeed were entirely subjugated under men's rule: "nec permitte eas in lacum perditionis demergi per potestatem conuiuantium prelatorum" (9; "Do not allow them to sink in the lake of perdition through the power of the feasting prelates!;" 66). Similarly in a letter to the Bishop of Liège (ca. 1148–1153), Hildegard appeals to this authority to fulfill his role as representative of the Church: "Vnde tu, o precessor populi, pugna in bona uictoria, et sic errantes corrige et sic pulchras margaritas de putredine ablue" ("Therefore, teacher of the people, fight for the good victory. Correct those in error, and so wash the mud from the beautiful pearls").⁵¹ Interestingly, the abbess does not assume political power directly, and does not claim to be the secret leader of the Church. Nevertheless, by resorting to "reportorial expressions" Hildegard exerts the power of a mediator between mankind and God and elevates herself to an advisor to the clerical authorities.⁵² Because she speaks as a visionary, the writer sees herself more closely related to the Godhead than to the worldly clergy and so argues from a position of absolute strength: "mens tua assidue in bono studio anhelet has margaritas ad montem istum reuocare, sicut eas donum Dei primitus instituit" (97; "Let your mind pant with great eagerness to call those pearls back to the mountain where the gift of God had its origin;" 67).

Addressing other female mystics in her letters, Hildegard pursues fairly similar strategies, assuming, on the one hand, the most humble position possible in her role as a human speaker, and expressing, on the other, God's own voice, thus closely associating herself with him. In her letter to Elisabeth von Schönau from ca. 1152–1156, for instance, Hildegard formulates this dialectical approach most powerfully: "Ego paupercula forma et fictile uas hec non a me, sed de serena luce dico" ("I, a mere female and a fragile vessel, speak these things not from me but from the serene light").⁵³ Although she portrays herself only as a vessel, as an instrument, as a tool in the hand of God, she gains enormously in power because

⁵¹ Hildegard, *Epistolarium*, Pars Prima, 97; Hildegard, *Selected Writings*, 67.

⁵² Gillian T. W. Ahlgren, "Visions and Rhetorical Strategy in the Letters of Hildegard von Bingen," *Dear Sister. Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*, ed. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 46–63; here 51.

⁵³ Hildegard, *Epistolarium*, Pars Secunda, 456; Hildegard, *Selected Writings*, 79. See also Anne L. Clark, *Elisabeth of Schönau. A Twelfth-Century Visionary*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

of the intimate relationship with the Godhead: "Homo est uas quod Deus sibimetipsi edificauit et quod sua inspiratione imbuit, ita quod opera sua in illo perficeret" (456; "a human being is a vessel that God has built for himself and filled with his inspiration so that his works are perfected in it;" 79). Despite her alleged fragility, which by itself easily proves to be a well-established rhetorical humility topos going as far back as to the Roman law codified under Justinian,⁵⁴ Hildegard quickly comes full circle and identifies all human beings as fragile in the face of God: "Qui opera Dei perficere desiderant, semper attendant quod fictilia uasa sunt, quoniam homines existunt" (457; "those who want to perfect the works of God should always attend to the fact that they are fragile vessels, for they are human beings;" 80). This suddenly reverses the traditional gender roles and forces the reader to reconsider all of Hildegard's statements regarding her female nature. Warning her listener not to be overly presumptuous in their earthly existence, she casts all human beings as "exsules sunt celestia nescientes" (457; "exiles and ignorant of heavenly things;" 81). She, however, as a mystical visionary, describes herself as a tired person who "interdum sonans aliquantulum uelut paruus sonus tube a uiuente lumine" (457; "at times sound[s] forth as the small sound of the trumpet from the Living Light;" 81). No sound, however, would come out of the trumpet if not for the Godhead who "aliis spirat ut sonum reddat" (457; "blow[s] into it so that it will make a sound;" 81).⁵⁵ The metaphor implies that she as a mystic is graced with being God's trumpet, and her words then are the results of God's blowing of the trumpet. Subsequently, the teachings by the theologians who deduct their wisdom from the thorough reading and study of the Bible carries considerably less value than her own revelations because they are the only true reflection of "uiuente lumine" (457; "the Living Light;" 81).

As Gillian Ahlgren has observed, "[t]he implication here is clear: the voice of an authoritative female figure is needed to establish order among male church leaders."⁵⁶ In fact, Hildegard exerted considerable pressure on the entire Church hierarchy to enact highly needed reforms. "Thus she portrayed herself—and was approached—as a channel of grace to those who sought her insight into their moral and spiritual problems."⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *The Fragility of Her Sex'? Medieval Irish Women in Their European Context*, ed. Christine Meek and Katherine Simms (Kill Lane, Blackrock: Four Courts Press, 1996); for the classical tradition of the humility topos, reaching far into the early modern age, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. With a New Afterword by Peter Godman, transl. from the German by Willard R. Trask. Bollingen Series, XXXVI (1948; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 407–13.

⁵⁵ Margaret Wade Labarge, *A Small Sound of the Trumpet: Women in Medieval Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

⁵⁶ Ahlgren, "Visions and Rhetorical Strategy," 53.

⁵⁷ Ahlgren, "Visions and Rhetorical Strategy," 54.

Significantly, the mystic reflects a strong concern with the well-being of her world and indicates how much she is afraid of general decline in virtues and morality: "Sic, o filia Elisabeth, mundus mutatur. Iam enim mundus lassus est in omni uiredine uirtutum" (457; "Elisabeth, the world is changing. It has grown tired in all the vigour of the virtues and powers;" 80). But she hastens to add: "in hoc tempore necesse est quod Deus aliquos homines irriget, ne instrumenta ipsius otiosa sint" (457; "at this time, it is necessary that God should water certain human beings so that his instruments do not become idle;" 80), obviously referring to herself as His mouthpiece, hence as the one person authorized to speak as the public critic who would challenge not only her fellow sisters, but also, and above all, the male authorities, the ecclesiastics.

In her letter to Eberhard, Bishop of Bamberg (1157), Hildegard strongly urged him to give his support to the Nun Gertrud in her effort to establish a new convent: "Adiuua ergo eam quantum potes, ob amorem illius qui ante principium fuit et qui in misericordia omnia impleuit, ita ut uinea in filia ista non destruat" ("Help her therefore as much as you can—for the love of Him who was before creation and who fulfilled all things with his compassion—so that the vineyard within this daughter may never be destroyed!").⁵⁸ Similarly, she encourages Gertrud and gives her comfort in a difficult situation: "carissima filia, fecisti quando pompam huius mundi reliquisti" ("Dearest daughter, you also did this when you gave up the pomp of this world"). And: "Nunc autem de te gaudeo, quia in te completa sunt que de te audiui et desiderauit; et tu mecum gaude" ("But now I have joy in you, because what I have heard and desired for you is now complete; you should rejoice with me too").⁵⁹ To an anonymous abbess in Bamberg, Hildegard sent words of encouragement and urging: "Tu quoque ostensionem firmamenti tibi propone, ne lumen rationalitatis tue ob nigras nequitias, fallente diabolo, abscondas, quasi uix uiuas" ("You should put before you a vision of the firmament so that you do not hide the light of your reason behind black clouds of evil, as if you were barely alive").⁶⁰

As Hildegard scholarship has often observed, and which has subsequently been confirmed by extensive research on female mysticism, the personal exchanges with the Godhead gave these women tremendous self-confidence and also public power because they spoke up as visionaries and were, if acknowledged by the Church, considered as new prophetesses.⁶¹ This is often reflected in Hildegard's

⁵⁸ Hildegard, *Epistolarium*, Pars Prima, 81; Hildegard, *Selected Writings*, 82–83.

⁵⁹ Hildegard, *Epistolarium*, Pars Prima, 145–46; Hildegard, *Selected Writings*, 83.

⁶⁰ Hildegard, *Epistolarium*, Pars Prima, 143; Hildegard, *Selected Writings*, 85.

⁶¹ The opposite also could be the case, as documented by the tragic case of Marguerite Porete, who was burned at the stake in 1310, see the English translation of her *Mirror of Simple Souls* (her name is here spelled 'Porette'), transl. from the French with an Introductory Interpretative Essay by Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., J.C. Marler, and Judith Grant, and a Foreword by Kent Emery, Jr. Notre

personal mystical visions, most intriguingly formulated in her *Scivias*. Here we also discover parallel formulations of the *humility* topos, such as when she states in *Redemption*: “Et EGO homo non calens in forma fortium leonum nec docta exspiratione illorum, sed manens in mollitie fragilis costae imbuta mystico spiramine, uidi quasi lucidissimum ignem incomprehensibilem, inextinguibilem, totum uiuentem, totumque uitam existentem . . . Et uidi quod eadem flamma fulminans incanduit” (“And I, a human being, neither ablaze with the strength of strong lions nor learned in their exhalations, remaining in the fragility of the weaker rib, but filled with mystical inspiration, saw: a shining fire, unfathomable, inextinguishable, fully alive and existing full of life . . . And I saw the shining flame glow white”).⁶² Despite her references to her gender-specific fragility, which she plays out with deliberate rhetorical skill so as to undermine it quickly again, she rises above her human existence and reports her visions that only she could see. The divine voice reiterates what all male clerics would say to her as a first response: “in nomine femineo indocta de ulla doctrina carnalium magistrorum, . . . sed tantum tacta lumine meo, quod tangit te interius cum incendio ut ardens sol, clama et enarra ac scribe haec mysteria mea que uides et audis in mystica uisione. Noli ergo esse timida, sed dic ea quae intellegis in spiritu” (111–12; “Though as a woman you are uneducated in any doctrine of fleshly teachers. . . , nevertheless you are touched by my light, which touches your inner being with fire like the burning sun. Shout and tell! And write down these my mysteries which you see and hear in the mystical vision! Do not be afraid, but tell the mysteries as you understand them in the spirit;” 10–11). In fact, Hildegard goes one step further and severely criticizes her male contemporaries for their failings fully to understand the messages of the Godhead: “nolentes se abstrahere de malis desideriis suis, quae illis ita adhaerent quasi sint magistri eorum facientia eos fugere a facie Domini, ita ut erubescant loqui ueritatem” (112; “They have no will to cease from their evil desires, which stick to them as though they were their teachers, causing them to run away from the face of the Lord, so that they are ashamed to speak the truth;” 11).

The mystic clearly identifies the male stereotypes and uses them to her own advantage: “quamuis conculcata sis per uirilem formam propter praeuuaricationem Euae, tamen dic igneum opus quod tibi demonstratur certissima ostensione” (112; “although you are trampled by the male form because of Eve’s transgression, speak nevertheless of the fiery work of salvation which this most certain vision

Dame Texts in Medieval Culture, 6 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

⁶² Hildegard, *Scivias*, ed. Adelgundis Führkötter O.S.B. Collaborante Angela Carlevaris O.S.B. Corpvs Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis, XLIII (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978), 110; Hildegard, *Selected Writings*, 9; for an alternative translation, see also *Scivias*, transl. by Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop. Introduced by Barbara J. Newman. Preface by Caroline Walker Bynum. The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990).

reveals to you!;" 11). Specifically alluding to the myth of *Genesis* and women's alleged evilness, weakness, and lack of understanding, Hildegard has the Godhead raise her above all her contemporaries because of the grace which He has bestowed upon her.

Hildegard was one of the most powerful mystics and also gained the most influence on public life probably because she was not only recognized as a mystic, but also because she overcame the standard gender stereotype and claimed the highest authority both within the Church and in society because she reflected God's own words and thus stood directly beneath him as the mystical vessel. Addressing a wide-ranging audience, Hildegard underscores that she as a woman enjoys the same power as the prophets in the Old Testament: "Sed tu, o homo, dum eminentiam consilii huius humano more plenius scire desideras claustrum occultationis tibi opponitur; quoniam secreta Dei non debes plus scrutari quam propter amorem credulorum diuina maiestas uult manifestari" ("You, human creature! In the way of humans, you desire to know more about this exalted plan, but a seal of secrecy will be imposed on you; for you are not permitted to investigate the secrets of God more than the divine majesty wishes to reveal, because of his love for believers").⁶³ Certainly, Hildegard might have been an exception, but the degree to which she could claim public, spiritual, theological, and also political influence represents an extreme. Any other woman who achieved only a lesser role in public life still could assume remarkable functions within women's convents and, if inspired by mystical visions, in the general public. In other words, it would be erroneous to equate common statements by representatives of the Church and of outright misogynist writers with the actual position of women within high-medieval society.⁶⁴ In fact, the higher the pitch of misogyny and gynophobia among male clerics and other writers from the high Middle Ages, the more we might be able to deduce that women enjoyed considerable respect and were certainly not as downtrodden and subjugated as their male critics wanted them to be and as modern feminists claim as well in support of their own ideological battles. Vicious attacks against women simply because of their gender tend to reveal the critic's own insecurity and tell us little about women's actual life, their works, and their public roles. Both Heloise in her letters to Abelard (first half of the twelfth century) and Christine de Pizan (1364–ca. 1429) would serve as excellent examples, but many other women writers,

⁶³ Hildegard, *Scivias*, 118–19; Hildegard, *Selected Writings*, 17.

⁶⁴ An almost classical example of male-oriented scholarship and its highly limited sensitivity vis-à-vis the role of women in medieval society is now provided by Horst Brunner, "Hie ist diu aventiure geholt - / wa ist nu der minne solt? Die Rolle der Frau des Helden in einigen nachklassischen Artusromanen," *Literarische Leben: Rollenentwürfe in der Literatur des Hoch- und Spätmittelalters. Festschrift für Volker Mertens zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Matthias Meyer and Hans-Jochen Schiewer (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002) 2002, 55–65.

artists, artisans, nuns and abbesses, and rulers would also confirm this observation.⁶⁵

Marie de France

To gain additional support for our thesis, let us turn to the equally famous Marie de France and her admirable *Lais*, composed sometime around 1170–1180.⁶⁶ Although it has remained a guesswork to identify the original author, there is no doubt that Marie represented a highly self-conscious writer who firmly left her mark through her texts and demonstrated how much a woman could emerge as a moral and ethical leader of her society.

In her *Prologue*, Marie explicitly emphasizes her public duty to speak up because she has, as a poet, “Ki Deus ad duné escience / E de parler bone eloquence” (1–2; “received from God the gift of knowledge and true eloquence;” 41)—a quote borrowed from the New Testament, Matthew 25: 14–32.⁶⁷ Although she refers to men in the past who had already formulated the basic philosophy of literary and theoretical discourse (Priscian), she directly relates herself to these men and claims to be on a par with them: “Pur ceo començai a penser / D’aukune bone estoire faire / E de latin en romaunz traire” (28–30; “I began to think of working on some good story and translating a Latin text into French;” 41). Entirely undaunted, as it seems by the accomplishments of ancient thinkers and writers, all of whom had been male, she plainly claims a similar role by reactivating the stories in oral poetry she had heard herself and here wants to cast them into poetic form. Marie dedicates her *lais* to a king—possibly Henry II of England⁶⁸—and thus affiliates herself without any compunction with the highest ranking person in the country. She injects a brief disclaimer: “Ne me tenez a surquidiee / Si vos os faire icest present”

⁶⁵ *Listening to Heloise. The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler. The New Middle Ages (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000); Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan. Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea Books, 1984); for a powerful theoretical study, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

⁶⁶ *Les lais de Marie de France*, ed. Jean Rychner. Classiques français du Moyen Age, 93 (Paris: Champion, 1983); for the English translation, see *The Lais of Marie de France*, transl. with an Introduction by Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby (London: Penguin, 1986). I will quote the Old French referring to the verse numbers, adding the page number only when I turn to a new *lai*; the English translations I will identify by page numbers.

⁶⁷ Eva Rosenn, “The Secular and Textual Politics of Marie’s Poetics,” *In Quest of Marie de France, a Twelfth-Century Poet*, ed. Chantale A. Maréchal. Medieval and Renaissance Series, 10 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 225–42; here 225; see also M. J. Donovan, “Priscian and the Obscurity of the Ancients,” *Speculum* 36 (1961): 75–80.

⁶⁸ Burgess, Busby, “Introduction,” 12.

(54–55; “Do not consider me presumptuous if I make so bold as to offer you this gift,” 41), but the less she defends or explains herself as a writer asking for the King’s favor, the more we discover significant parallels to Hildegard in her mystical revelations. In fact, the prologue reveals more about Marie de France’s self-consciousness as a writer the less she specifically addresses the issue. She does not defend herself for assuming a role within a men’s world. She does not apologize for speaking up as a woman, and never seems to see any reason why she should. She has no hesitation to equate her literary creativity with the philosophy by the ancients. Moreover, she goes so far as to assume that her *lais* will achieve wide-spread fame: “Quant uns granz biens est mult oïz, / Dunc a primes est il fluriz” (5–6; “When a truly beneficial thing is heard by many people, it then enjoys its first blossom, but if it is widely praised its flowers are in full bloom;” 41).⁶⁹ Finally, Marie considers her own work as an instrument warding off the danger of vice as the literary discourse requires intensive studies which in turn require from the reader full dedication and attention to the ethical meaning of the text—“Estudier deit e entendre / A grevose ovre comencier” (24–25; “should study intently and undertake a demanding task;” 41).⁷⁰ In addition, insofar as she refers to a long-standing tradition of oral poetry, which she is concluding with her effort to write down the *lais*, Marie considers herself as an important successor who plays a significant role in preserving them as tales and particularly the memory of the adventures they were actually based on: “Ke pur remembrance les firent / Des aventures k’il oïrent” (35–36; “to perpetuate the memory of adventures they had heard;” 41). More interestingly, in the prologue to *Guigemar*, Marie underscores the need to relate a story well and not to squander the talent of any writer, whether male or female (p. 5; 43). Above all, Marie claims for herself the role of an historian because she knows the stories “ke jo sai verrais” (19; “to be true;” 43) and implicitly characterizes herself as one of the persons whom she identifies as “la gent loër” (5; “good reputation;” 43) who deserve to be acknowledged, though there are many slanderers in public.

Like Christine de Pizan about two hundred years after her, Marie had to struggle to maintain herself as a writer faced by public criticism, to which she refers here in concrete terms: “Pur ceo comencent le mestier / Del malveis chien coart, felun, / Ki mort la gent par traïsun” (12–14; “they start acting like a vicious,

⁶⁹ Lesley Smith, “Scriba, Femina: Medieval Depictions of Women Writing,” *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Jane H.M. Taylor and Lesley Smith. The British Library Studies in Medieval Culture (London: The British Library; Toronto, and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 21–44; here 35–38.

⁷⁰ For a parallel image and ethical appeal, see Eric Jager, *The Book of the Heart* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000); see also *The Book and the Magic of Reading in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Garland Medieval Bibliographies, 24 (New York and London: Garland, 1999).

cowardly, treacherous dog which will bite others out of malice;" 43).⁷¹ But she also enjoyed considerable support, especially among the highest class, not to speak of the King himself for whom she intended most of her texts for didactic purposes.⁷² In the introductory paragraph to *Equitan*, Marie reemphasizes the importance of the adventurous accounts originally told by the ancient Bretons as these had been "Mut unt esté noble barun" (p. 33, 1; "valiant, courtly and noble men;" 56). According to the author, these were adventures of considerable didactic value, hence she as the new writer assumes the task of preserving them for posterity: "Un ent firent, k'oï cunter / Ki ne fet mie a ublier" (9–10; "One of them, which I have heard recited, should not be forgotten;" 56). There is truth to these tales, as Marie underscores, such as in the prologue to *Lanval*: "Cum ele avint, vus cunterai" (p. 72, 2; "Just as it happened, I shall relate to you the story of another lay;" 73). The truth contained in the *lais* emerges as comparably relevant as Hildegard's mystical visions, and the female author gains considerable public power by serving as an intermediary between the spiritual experience (Hildegard) or the historical truth (Marie) on the one hand and the audiences, contemporary society at large, on the other.

Intriguingly, Marie gained considerable public support for her writing, as she indicates in the prologue to *Yonec*: "Puis que des lays ai comencié, / Ja n'iert pur mun travail laissié / Les aventures que j'en sai, / Tut par rime les cunterai" (p. 102, 1–4; "Now that I have begun to compose lays, I shall not cease my effort but shall relate fully in rhyme the adventures that I know;" 86). Not daunted by the task at hand or by public criticism, she continued with her intellectual activity and achieved, as we can tell on the basis of the five manuscripts containing her texts,⁷³ remarkable respect. This is also reflected in the selection of her themes and the presentation of individual protagonists. As Rupert T. Pickens observes, "[i]ndeed, as a woman who is a poet, she boldly appropriates to herself the attributes—and the aggressiveness—of the male writer and, moreover, invites her *destinataire*, a feminized king, to join her in an amorous embrace."⁷⁴ In the prologue to *Milun*,

⁷¹ See, for example, Christine McWebb, "Lyrical Conventions and the Creation of Female Subjectivity in Christine de Pizan's *Cent ballades d'Amant et de Dame*," *Christine de Pizan and Medieval French Lyric*, ed. Earl Jeffrey Richards (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1998), 168–83.

⁷² In fact, Marie, in her *fables*, addressed the same issues as John of Salisbury in his *Policraticus* (1159) and enjoyed wide-spread popularity, see Karen K. Jambeck, "The *Fables* of Marie de France: A Mirror of Princes," *In Quest of Marie de France, A Twelfth-Century Poet*, ed. with an Introduction by Chantal A. Maréchal (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 59–106.

⁷³ Burgess, Busby, "Introduction," 7–8; see also Rychner, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, XIX–XXVIII; for Marie's self-consciousness, see also Miranda Griffin, "Gender and Authority in the Medieval French *Lai*," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 35, 1 (1999): 42–56; Chantal A. Maréchal, "Marie de France as Sapientia: Author Portraits in the Manuscripts of the *Fables*," *Le Cygne: Bulletin of the International Marie de France Society: Abstracts, Notes and Queries* 3 (1997): 45–58.

⁷⁴ Rupert T. Pickens, "Marie de France and the Body Poetic," *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*,

Marie discusses the question of how a poet can reach his/her audience. Obviously fully aware of how successful she herself has been in this respect, she continues with a new *lai*. This, in turn, is supposed to confirm her theory: "Ki divers cuntes veut traitier / Diversement deit comencier / E parler si rainablement / K'il seït pleisibles a la gent" (p. 126, 1-4; "Anyone who intends to present a new story must approach the problem in a new way and speak so persuasively that the tale brings pleasure to people;" 97). Marie strongly believes in her own skills as a writer and knows, it seems, how to realize her own goals, as she can, as she implies, indeed provide literary entertainment. At the same time she publicly admits how much joy she derived from writing down her tale: "E jeo, ki l'ai mis en escrit, / Al recunter mut me delit" (p. 142, 533-34; "I who have set it down in writing have had much pleasure in relating it;" 104), which seems to imply that Marie did not face any serious criticism and enjoyed, on the contrary, considerable recognition. Not surprisingly, she also tried her literary skill with one of the most popular tales, the *Tristan* saga. In the prologue to her *Chevrefoil*, she states clearly: "Asez me plect e bien le voil / Del lai qu'hum nume *Chevrefoil*, / Que la verité vus en cunt / Pur quei fu fez, coment e dunt" (p. 151, 1-4; "It pleases me greatly and I am eager to relate to you the truth of the lay called *Chevrefoil*, to say why it was composed and how it originated;" 109).⁷⁵ Again, why would it "please[]" her, if she did not expect to have great success with her *lai*, especially as she is "eager to relate" her tale which would significantly contribute to the famous *Tristan* tradition.

In contrast to all other personal comments, Marie here also emphasizes that she had heard the story related by many people: "Plusur le m'unt cunté e dit / E jeo l'ai trové en escrit" (5-6; "Many people have recited it to me and I have also found it in a written form;" 109). Whereas before the author regarded herself as a mediator between the past and the present, between ancient tales and oral traditions in danger of being lost, here she chimes in with a loud chorus of contemporary voices and contributes even one further version of the well-known account of Tristan and Isolde. Marie regards the account as true, and specifically refers to Tristan as the first who had written it down: "Tristram, ki bien saveit harper, / En aveit fet un nuvel lai / Asez briefment le numerai" (112-14; "Tristram, a skilful harpist, in order to record his words [as the queen had said he should], used them to create a new lay. I shall very briefly name it;" 110). Here Marie relates herself directly with the renowned literary protagonist and transforms him into a historical figure. Since she draws directly from this source which she considers as fully truthful, her own account gains in value because of its alleged historical veracity: "Dit vus en

ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1996), 135-71; here 160.

⁷⁵ Alois Wolf, *Gottfried von Strassburg und die Mythe von Tristan und Isolde* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), 21-26; Keith Busby, "'Ceo fu la somme de l'escrit' (*Chevrefoil*, Line 61) Again," *Philological Quarterly* 74, 1 (1995): 1-15.

ai la verité / Del lai que j'ai ici cunté" (117–18; "I have told you the truth of the lay I have related here;" 110).

Once again, Marie's self-presentation reveals more through what it does not say than through the concrete words. Matter-of-factly she places herself in one of the most famous medieval literary traditions and claims her own stake in it. As Alois Wolf discovered, Marie's version or episode "findet sich in keiner der vorhandenen vollwertigen Tristandichtungen."⁷⁶ We know this from a comparative analysis, but the author herself does not comment on it. We may, however, deduce from this short epilogue that Marie was entirely unconcerned about her position as a writer and freely contributed to the courtly literature by rewriting or reinventing a specific adventure in the life of these two famous lovers, Tristan and Isolde. She mentions both the English (*Gotelef*) and the French title (*Chevrefoil*), thus injecting a few elements of her own learnedness without falling into the trap of a writer's arrogance. Nevertheless, the calmness with which she reflects upon her own writing process indicates the degree to which she considered herself as a fully-accepted member of a learned, and high-cultured society for which she provided important literary materials: "I have told you the truth of the lay I have related here" (110).

So far we have only analyzed the way how Marie presents herself in the various prologues and epilogues. Can we confirm the results of our observations by an analysis of the female protagonists as well? Do they all conform to the patriarchal ideal and do they represent nothing but muted, subjugated wives or courtly girl friends? Would Horst Brunner's recent judgment — "An den Frauengestalten der klassischen Romane haben die Autoren der späteren Artusromane sich freilich allenfalls in bescheidenem Umfang orientiert"⁷⁷ — be justified in light of Marie's *Lais*?⁷⁸ With respect to Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Willehalm* (ca. 1218), Christopher Young now argues that the outstanding heroine Gyburg is quickly "muffled, subdued and reduced to her given role within patriarchy," reconfirming the established pattern of gender relationships.⁷⁹ And George Duby, in his *Women of*

⁷⁶ Wolf, *Gottfried*, 23.

⁷⁷ Brunner, "Hie ist diu aventiure geholt - / wa ist nu der minne solt?," 63: The authors of the late-medieval Arthurian romances hardly ever took note of the female role models developed in the classical high-medieval romances.

⁷⁸ With respect to the women in the Stricker's *Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal*, I have argued to the opposite, "The Role of Women in the Stricker's Courtly Romance 'Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal'," *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages. An Anthology of Feminist Approaches to Middle High German Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 528 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991), 87–103; see also Richard L. Lawson's and Ruth H. Firestone's contributions to this volume.

⁷⁹ Christopher Young, "The Construction of Gender in *Willehalm*," *Wolfram's "Willehalm". Fifteen Essays*, ed. Martin H. Jones and Timothy McFarland. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002), 249–69; here 268.

the Twelfth Century (1998; orig. 1996), reflecting upon his own *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest* (1983; orig. 1981), reaches the highly disturbing conclusion from decades of his own research: "None of their words has survived. All the speech that was attributed to them at the time is masculine. . . . I can imagine them, at least, on their own territory, beneath the veils in which male authority enveloped them, inside the walls within which it wished to keep them confined, and behind the screen that is erected before the historian's eyes by the invective and the contempt of men."⁸⁰

Women Who Spoke Up

Neither Hildegard von Bingen nor Marie de France would have agreed. Nor would have scores of other women writers from the same time period and from later centuries have agreed with Duby's opinion. I believe the time for a thorough reexamination of this paradigm has come, especially as Duby openly admits that he knows "more about the men who were their contemporaries, and about how they saw women."⁸¹ Many women, however, spoke up, and many have left remarkable traces of their opinions, attitudes, personal influence, and visions.

In the case of Marie's *Lais*, a highly complex image of courtly ladies arises. In *Guigemar*, for instance, the female protagonist is treated by her husband like a prisoner, but she fights against her sad destiny and resists the temptation that the pictures of Lady Venus in her bedroom derived from Ovidian materials are supposed to effect. Undoubtedly, she does not develop any feelings of love for her husband and thus rejects, on behalf of her creator Marie, the entire Ovidian tradition, perhaps because this love is calculated and manipulative, overpowering and subjugating women's own feelings, as Robert Hanning has suggested.⁸² When Guigemar arrives, she treats his wounds and quickly heals him, and both fall in love with each other. The narrator severely criticizes those men "Ki jolivent par tut le mund, / Puis s'avantent de ceo que funt. N'est pas amur, einz est folie, / E mauveistié e lecherie!" (p. 20, 489–92; "who philander around the world and then boast of their deeds. That is not love, but rather foolishness, wickedness and

⁸⁰ Georges Duby, *Women of the Twelfth Century*. Vol. 3: *Eve and the Church*, transl. Jean Birrell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 121.

⁸¹ Duby, *Women of the Twelfth Century*, 122.

⁸² R[obert] W. Hanning, "Courtly Contexts for Urban *Cultus*: Responses to Ovid in Chrétien's *Cligès* and Marie's *Guigemar*," *Symposium* 35, 1 (1981): 34–56, here 45; Roberta L. Krueger, "Beyond Debate: Gender in Play in Old French Courtly Fiction," *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees. The New Middle Ages, (New York, NY: Palgrave; 2002), 79–95; here 83, offers the rather curious interpretation that the Lady might have painted the scene herself, which finds no corroboration in the text.

debauchery. A loyal partner, once discovered, should be served, loved and obeyed;" 49).⁸³

Unfortunately, they are eventually discovered, meaning that Guigemar is driven away, and his beloved is put under even stricter prison terms. Later, when the lady has escaped from her old husband and is kept by the Lord Meriaduc, he also treats her like an object which he could possess: "Jeo la trovai, si la tendrai / E cuntre vus la defendrai!" (851–52; "I found her and I shall keep her and defend her against you;" 54). Eventually Guigemar defeats also this opponent and is reunited with his beloved. Both, however, had given each other coded signs of love, and only because both can open the enigmatic knots which they had created in the belt and the shirt respectively, are they empowered to find each other and enjoy each other's love. As Eva Rosenn has observed, "[i]n *Guigemar* fantasy serves to allow Marie to resolve her hero's social irresponsibility due to his undeveloped sexuality."⁸⁴ Certainly, the Lady is treated like an object, especially when she is under the control of her old husband and later Lord Meriaduc. However, she freely seeks out her lover and steadfastly refuses to submit to Meriaduc's wooing because he cannot open the knot in the belt, a powerful symbol of her love which she would give freely only to Guigemar. Both the clear description of the Lady's mistreatment at the hand of these older men, and her struggle to free herself suggest that Marie created this figure as an example of the tragic consequences for a woman if she is forced to marry a man whom she does not love.⁸⁵ Consequently, Marie indirectly demands from her contemporaries to give young women a free choice in their marriage partners and to refrain from the traditional practice of allowing the parents to determine their daughters' destiny. Significantly, Marie found support and approval of her arguments. As the contemporary philosopher Peter Lombard (ca. 1095–1160), for example formulated in his *Sententiae* (IV, 27, PL 192, 910): "The efficient cause of matrimony is consent."⁸⁶

⁸³ Many of those songs and poems that were composed by medieval and early-modern women poets, such as the *trobairitz* and the *Skáldonur*, reflect the same criticism against male philandering, see, for example, H. Jay Siskin, Julie A. Storme, "Suffering Love: The Reversed Order in the Poetry of Na Castelloza," *The Voice of the Trobairitz. Perspectives on the Women Troubadours*, ed. William D. Paden. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 113–27; Albrecht Classen, "'Ach Gott, wem soll ichs klagen': Women's Erotic Poetry in Sixteenth-Century German Song Books," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 98 (1997): 293–313.

⁸⁴ Rosenn, "The Secular and Textual Politics," 236.

⁸⁵ June Hall McCash, "*La vie seinte Audree*," 776, points out that Marie—if she is the author of this hagiographical narrative—returned to her major theme formulated in the *Lais*: "her sympathy for the woman imprisoned in a marriage to a man she does not love and whose only way out seems to be through her internal resources, adultery, or death."

⁸⁶ Here quoted from Neil Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage. Literary Approaches, 1100–1300* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), 17.

The lady in *Equitan* at first becomes a victim of Equitan's wooing, but once they have formed a love relationship, she dominates the subsequent events entirely and manipulates the King to accept her strategy to kill her husband (39–40; 59).⁸⁷ Insofar as both Equitan and the lady die themselves, we may deduce that Marie rejected such devious and murderous behavior and strongly argued in favor of honest, open love, preferably in a marital union, although she still deplored the obviously unhappy marriage.

A number of the subsequent *Lais* reflect on rather negative female characters; the lady in *Le Fresne* spreads false rumors and abandons one of her two baby daughters when the slander is about to come back to her. In *Bisclavret*, the unnamed wife betrays her husband and forces him to stay a werewolf once she has learned of his habits of shape shifting for three days every week. In *Lanval*, King Arthur's wife (Guinevere) tries to seduce Lanval, and when he rejects her, she accuses him of having tried to force himself upon her, but at the end the young man's fairy mistress comes to his rescue and takes him, once she has cleared his name of all reproaches, with her to Avalon.

Beginning with *Les deus amanz*, Marie tells the stories of victimized women who struggle hard against their sorrowful destiny but cannot always fend off their tragic death. Here the young lady advises her lover to secure a magical potion from her learned aunt in Salerno, and she also takes all precautions to help him in the contest which requires him to carry her to the top of the mountain.⁸⁸ She dies, however, along with him because of a broken heart, although their happiness almost would have been guaranteed by the potion except for his stubbornness and arrogance with which he rejected her advice and admonishment.⁸⁹ Here we also discover serious criticism against the widowed father who tries to keep his daughter for himself, guarding her jealously against all potential wooers, thus

⁸⁷ Intriguingly, the same can be observed with respect to Isolde in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* where she assumes total control before the ordeal scene, operating like a stage director and assigning her lover specific roles which he has to act out to deceive the court audience. Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, transl. entire for the first time. With the surviving fragments of the *Tristan of Thomas*. With an Introduction by A. T. Hatto (1960; London: Penguin, 1984); see Albrecht Classen, "Matriarchy versus Patriarchy: The Role of Queen Isolde in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*," *Neophilologus* LXXIII, 1 (1989): 77–89.

⁸⁸ Here is not the room to explore the significant role of women healers in the Middle Ages, but see Monica H. Green, *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West. Texts and Contexts*. Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot, Burlington, et al.: Ashgate, 2000).

⁸⁹ Scholarship has strangely disregarded this significant criticism, although it is precisely the young man's failure to acknowledge the wisdom of his beloved that brings death to both of them, see Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr., *Marie de France*, 112; for other approaches, see Peter R. Grillo, "Folklore et hagiographie dans le lai des Deux amants," *Romance Philology* 45 (1992): 469–83; Minnie B. Sangster, "A Study of the Legend and the Location of 'Les Deux Amanz' from the Middle Ages to Modern Times," *Le Cygne: Bulletin of the International Marie de France Society: Abstracts, Notes and Queries* 4 (1998): 11–27.

depriving both of their future, and evoking the suspicion of an incestuous relationship.⁹⁰ In *Yonec* an old man keeps his young wife like a prisoner, and eventually murders her lover, the falcon man Yonec, by placing sharp spikes in the window where he comes flying in to see his lady. Eventually, however, her son, whom she had conceived with Yonec, avenges this injustice committed against his father and kills the old man.

In *Laüstic* the situation proves to be unclear at first sight, as the lady's husband enjoys considerable respect and yet does not win his wife's love. In fact, when he grows suspicious of her nightly behavior — she is spending hours during the night standing at the window secretly communicating with her lover on the other side — he has the nightingale trapped and kills it in front of her eyes, throwing the corpse on her body "Si que sun chainse ensanglanta / Un poi desur le piz devant" (p. 123, 118–19; "so that the front of her tunic was bespattered with blood, just on her breast;" 95). Once again we are confronted with an unhappy marriage, and the husband appears to be considerably older than the young lover living next door to her, not to speak of his brutal, crude, and unkind behavior toward his wife. As Neil Cartlidge has argued, "[i]n his inability to make more than a literal identification of the nightingale with the lover, the husband reveals the fundamental harshness of his soul."⁹¹

With *Milun* we observe a mixed case as the lady is married to an old man whom she does not like as she is in love with Milun, but money determined the matter for her father. Nevertheless, she had a child with Milun beforehand who will help his biological father twenty years later to be reunited with his beloved and to marry her. Here, but often in the other narratives as well, even if only implicitly, the focus rests on the happiness of husband and wife: "En grant bien e en grant duçur / Vesquirent puis e nuit e jur" (p. 142, 529–30; "Thereafter they lived night and day in happiness and tenderness;" 104). Leaving aside *Chaitivel* because of its highly unique constellation of the gender relationship, both *Chevrefoil* and *Eliduc* return to the issue of individual destiny, women's role, and the impact of love.

⁹⁰ For a comprehensive overview of literary examples dealing with incest, now see Elizabeth A. Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001). One of the most powerful examples in medieval German literature can be found in *Mai und Beafloer. Eine Erzählung aus dem dreizehnten Jahrhundert*. Dichtungen des deutschen Mittelalters, 7 (Leipzig: G. J. Göschen, 1848); a copy can now be found online at <http://www.gened.arizona.edu/aclassen/edition.htm> (last accessed on Feb. 23, 2007); but see also *Mai und Beafloer*. Hg., übersetzt, kommentiert und mit einer Einleitung von Albrecht Classen. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 6 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2006); for a critical study, see Albrecht Classen, "Kontinuität und Aufbruch: Innovative narrative Tendenzen in der spätmittelalterlichen deutschsprachigen Literatur. Der Fall *Mai und Beafloer*," *Wirkendes Wort* 48, 3 (1998): 324–344; id., "Roman Sentimental in the Middle Ages? *Mai und Beafloer* as a Literary Reflection of the Medieval History of Emotions," *Oxford German Studies* 35, 2 (2006): 83–100.

⁹¹ Neil Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage*, 179.

Whereas the former simply expands on the tradition-rich *Tristan* narrative, *Eliduc* presents a highly complex and difficult canvas where two women compete for the same man's love. None of the three person is negatively portrayed, although Eliduc's love affair with the young princess from a country near Exeter (158; 112) destroys his marriage. His wife, Guidelüec, who certainly proves to be an innocent victim, while realizing that her husband has fallen in love with another person, voluntarily gives up her claims on Eliduc and enters a convent. After many years of a happy and fulfilled life with the young bride, they both, Eliduc and Guilladun, also turn to the Church and join a convent. His first wife remarkably welcomes the other woman and "E mut li porta grant honur . . . Deu priouent pur lur ami / Qu'il li feïst bone merci, / E il pur eles repreiot. / Ses messages lur enveiot / Pur saveir cument lur estot, / Cum chescune se cunfortot" (p. 191, 1168–76; "showed her great honour. . . They prayed that God might show their beloved His sweet mercy and Eliduc in turn prayed for them, sending his messenger to see how they fared and how their spirits were;" 126).⁹²

Marie does not present to us female protagonists who exert truly dominant power. In fact, in many cases the women are unhappily married (*Guigemar*, *Yonec*, *Laüstic*, and *Milun*) and have no means available to do anything about it in constructive terms. Some of the women demonstrate an evil character (*Equitan*, *Bisclavret*), others are very young and suffer from their parents' mistreatment (*Le Fresne*, *Les deus amanz*). But some women energetically pursue their own path toward happiness and enjoy a secret love affair, although they have to hide it carefully from their husbands and society (*Yonec*, *Milun*).⁹³ Most impressive of them all, but also highly problematic, proves to be Eliduc's wife Guidelüec who voluntarily steps aside when she discovers her husband's beloved and rescues her from her coma although before she had enjoyed a happy marriage with him: "Ensemble furent lungement, / Muts'entreamerent lëaument" (11–12; "They lived together for a long time and loved each other with great loyalty;" 111). When she realizes how much Eliduc and Guilladun love each other, she makes the most astonishing move and frees her husband from his marital bond with her: "Quant la dame vit lur semblant, / Sun seignur ad a reisun mis : Cungié li ad rové e quis / Qu'ele puisse de lui partir" (1120–23; "When the lady saw how they looked, she spoke to her husband and asked him for permission to leave and to separate from him;" 125). In contrast to Eliduc, as Marco D. Roman observes, his first wife Guidelüec demonstrates a remarkable ability to communicate with her environment and to transform her self-chosen silence—entering a convent and

⁹² June Hall McCash, "*La vie seinte Audree*," discovers multiple parallels between *Eliduc* and this *vie seinte Audree* as both texts idealize the spiritual marriage and yet also support the happiness here in this world.

⁹³ Albrecht Classen, "Happiness in the Middle Ages? Hartmann von Aue and Marie de France," *Neohelicon* XXV, 2 (1998): 247–274.

taking the veil—into a “highly effective mode of communication typically characterized as female. The validity and empowering effect of this alternative code is evidenced by the male protagonists’ eventual adoption of the female practices of discourse modeled by the women characters.”⁹⁴

At first sight it would be hard to discover the same personality as represented by the author herself in any of Marie’s *Lais*, and yet she portrays all her characters as fairly complex individuals who do not follow their husbands like sheep and fight for their personal happiness. At closer analysis we can discover a remarkable criticism against the machinations of a patriarchal society, and discern a rather sharp opposition against traditional marriage practices. These are individual women who struggle against predetermined role models and pursue, though some of them fail because of their character weaknesses, a path toward their self-fulfillment. Marie does not simply idealize women, instead she projects literary scenes from which her audience could learn how to improve daily living conditions by allowing the right people to find each other and marry, sometimes even irrespective of the economic and political conditions that might suggest alternative connections.

Almost every *lai* is dominated by an extraordinary female character, whether in an active or in a passive role, as the narrator predicates all her accounts on specific human relationships and explores how they work out. When the male lover seems to occupy the foreground (*Les deus amanz*, *Milun*, *Eliduc*), their mistresses emerge as admirable, suffering characters in the background. When women suffer in an unhappy marriage in which the husband is much older, they struggle against this situation (*Guigemar*, *Yonec*) or patiently await the desired change in their life to come (*Milun*). Even when the female protagonists seem to pursue evil intentions (*Equitan*, *Bisclavret*, *Lanval*), guilt can also be found on the man’s side.

Certainly, Marie does not develop any concrete “feminist” agenda, but she opens multiple perspectives toward women’s lives and allows us to understand precisely how they operate within courtly society, within marriage, in their relationship with their parents, and how they respond to men’s erotic wooing. Even the male protagonists do not conform to the type presented in the *chansons de geste*, instead they tend to be, as Marcelle Thiébaux has underscored, “luckless, landless soldiers of fortune, struggling against the actual hazards and miseries of the profession of arms . . . Marie repudiates the mentality of the aggressive male military world, finding in it the sources of feminine unhappiness.”⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Marco D. Roman, “Reclaiming the Self Through Silence: *The Riverside Counselor’s* Stories and the *Lais* of Marie de France,” *Crossing the Bridge. Comparative Essays on Medieval European and Heian Japanese Women Writers*, ed. Barbara Stevenson and Cynthia Ho. The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 175–88, here 184.

⁹⁵ *The Writings of Medieval Women. An Anthology*. Second ed., transl. and introd. Marcelle Thiébaux. The Garland Library of Medieval Literature (New York and London: Garland, 1994), 279.

Hildegard von Bingen and Marie de France in tandem

Surprisingly parallel to Hildegard von Bingen, Marie asserted her own position in life and reflected, almost more through silence on her part than through explicit demonstrations, the considerable influence a woman of her caliber could exert. Challenging the sad state of affairs for many women in her time, she addresses the issue head on by presenting a collection of remarkable female characters who live their own lives and try to make their own decisions. When this decision-making power is taken away from them, tragedy lurks immediately. Neither Hildegard nor Marie specifically criticize the patriarchal structure of their societies, but implicitly they clearly staked their individuality and independence within a male-dominated world. Both their surprisingly natural ability to speak up in public and their unshakable confidence in the power of their own words strongly suggest that they were not simply exceptions to the rule, and that twelfth-century women enjoyed considerably more influence both in intellectual and in pragmatic matters than traditional scholarship has claimed at large. We might have to agree with Joachim Bumke that women had far fewer rights concerning inheritance and property and that many male authors often treated them like objects.⁹⁶ Wives could be physically punished by their husbands, which was publicly approved, even by the Church, but it would be erroneous that they were treated like chattel throughout the entire Middle Ages and had no defense against public and domestic violence, as I have demonstrated in chapter one and five in this book. And at festivities, women assumed not much more than a representational function.⁹⁷ However, as soon as we turn to texts composed by women such as Hildegard and Marie, remarkably different perspectives and attitudes emerge, forcing us to reexamine the gender relationship in the high Middle Ages, definitely not blithely trusting the comments by male theologians such as Marbod of Rennes, Walter Map, Thomas Aquinas, or Jacques de Vitry.⁹⁸ There were, indeed, as Eva Parra Membrives now poignantly formulates, “mundos femeninos emancipados” (worlds of emancipated women).⁹⁹ Our task remains to widen the perspective, to establish a new database of significant and influential women writers, artists, and rulers, and to free ourselves from traditional viewpoints that adamantly and rigidly identify the entire medieval world with total patriarchy.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Joachim Bumke, *Höfische Kultur. Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter*. Vol. 2 (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), 464.

⁹⁷ Bumke, *Höfische Kultur*, 465–67.

⁹⁸ *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, ed. Blamires, 91–147.

⁹⁹ Eva Parra Membrives, *Mundos femeninos emancipados. Reconstrucción teórico-empírica de una propuesta literaria femenina en la Edad Media alemana*. Textos de Filología, 5 (Zaragoza: Anubar. Ediciones, 1998).

¹⁰⁰ An interesting discovery is reported and discussed by Britta-Juliane Kruse, “Eine Witwe als

Mäzenin. Briefe und Urkunden zum Aufenthalt der Nürnberger Patrizierin Katharina Lemlin im Birgittenkloster Maria Mai (Maihingen)," *Literarische Leben*, 465–506; see also John M. Klassen, *The Letters of the Rožmberk Sisters: Noblewomen in Fifteenth-Century Bohemia*. Translated from Czech and German with Introduction, Notes and Interpretive Essay, with Eva Doležalová and Lynn Szabo. Library of Medieval Women (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001); Albrecht Classen, *Late-Medieval German Women's Poetry: Secular and Religious Songs*. Library of Medieval Women (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2004).

Chapter Four

Gender Crossing, Spiritual Transgression, and the Epistemological Experience of the Divine in Mystical Discourse: Hildegard von Bingen

I. Otherness in the Middle Ages

Medieval Studies have recently been infused with new excitement because of the contributions by two major research topics which surprisingly connect the Middle Ages with postmodernity.¹ On the one hand, the exploration of mystical literature has reached unforeseen proportions, as both theologians and historians, both gender and literary scholars have energetically struggled to identify visionary literature not just as a marginal phenomenon, but rather as a fascinating and far-reaching product of medieval spirituality which led to the creation of new textual, musical, and visual media for human epistemology and hermeneutics.² As Kate Greenspan emphasized correctly: "We must also question arguments that classify writing as a gender-determined activity. Women in great numbers wrote or dictated their visions, lives, revelations, and theologies. These works embodied a living tradition in the mainstream of medieval popular religion."³ Whether one is religious or not, there is no doubt that mystical accounts powerfully transgress traditional barriers between the physical and the metaphysical and connect the reader/listener with a world of apophatic spirituality that is normally not accessible through logic and rationality, hence also not through human language. Intriguingly, many of these mystics struggled hard to find new media to translate

¹ See, for example, Carolyn Dinshaw's somewhat problematic, because overly theoretical study: *Getting Medieval. Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 1999); *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. *The New Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), illustrates both the potentials and the dangers of this postmodern approaches to medieval studies.

² For a comprehensive overview, see Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*. 4 vols. (Munich: Beck, 1990–1999).

³ Kate Greenspan, "Autohagiography and Medieval Women's Spiritual Autobiography," *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1996), 216–36; here 232.

their ineffable experiences into something tangible and concrete, and resorted to a variety of performance strategies, whether their words were written down for the communal reading within a convent, a beguinage, or an anchorite cell, or whether they presented their visions through a deliberate theatrical staging (Elisabeth of Sparbeek), or even through singing.⁴ These most powerful experiences obviously catapulted medieval women out of their traditionally muted sphere into the limelight even of public life and provided them with unforeseen influence on the minds of their contemporaries insofar as they discovered the potentiality of the word for their exploration and coming to terms with the divine 'Other'.⁵

On the other hand, the realization that the experience with foreign cultures, peoples, countries, languages, and religions deeply influenced medieval culture has facilitated the emergence of a new field of scholarly investigations, xenology. Xenology is the study of 'the Other' in epistemological and anthropological terms.⁶ Questions regarding and inquiries pertaining to in/tolerance, conflictual relationships, confrontations with different races, peoples, and religions troubled and intrigued medieval people to a large extent, especially as the notion of tolerance, even in the modern sense of the word, was not entirely unknown in the Middle Ages.⁷ As we have become aware by now, 'the Other' represented a significant aspect of medieval phenomenology and was approached from many different perspectives, resulting in a plethora of attitudes ranging from pure hostility to fascination and curiosity, and finally to plain ignorance or rejection.⁸

⁴ See Mary A. Suydam's, Ulrike Wiethaus's, and Joanna E. Ziegler's contributions to *The Texture of Society: Medieval Women in the Southern Low Countries*, ed. Ellen E. Kittell and Mary A. Suydam (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁵ This phenomenon was the topic of an international symposium that I organized at the University of Arizona, Tucson, in April 2005, "Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance." A volume with proceedings is forthcoming (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies).

⁶ Marina Münkler, *Erfahrung des Fremden. Die Beschreibung Ostasiens in den Augenzeugenberichten des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000); see my review in *The Medieval Review* (<http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=tmr;cc=tmr;q1=Erfahrung%20des%20Fremden;rgn=main;view=text;idno=baj9928.0112.014>; last accessed on Feb. 23, 2007).

⁷ *Das Licht der Vernunft. Die Anfänge der Aufklärung im Mittelalter*, ed. Kurt Flasch and Udo Reinhold Jeck (Munich: Beck, 1997); *Toleranz im Mittelalter*, ed. Alexander Patschovsky and Harald Zimmermann. *Vorträge und Forschungen*, 45 (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1998); Cary J. Nederman, *Worlds of Difference. European Discourses of Toleration, c. 1100–c.1550* (University Park, P.A.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); Albrecht Classen, "Toleranz im späten 13. Jahrhundert, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Jans von Wien und Ramon Llull," *Mediaevistik* 17 (2004): 25–55.

⁸ For a summary of recent research and an outline of critical questions and observations, see the introduction to: *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), xi–lxxiii; for anthropological and more contemporary perspectives, see: *Kulturthema Fremdheit. Leitbegriffe und Problemfelder kulturwissenschaftlicher Fremdbegegnung*, ed. Alois

But whereas the dominant focus of recent investigation has traditionally rested on the specific contacts between Europeans and representatives of other races,⁹ on monster lore (teratology)¹⁰ and the fantastic,¹¹ the most fundamental confrontation with alterity and/or otherness occurred right in the center of Western society: the encounter with the Godhead through a mystical vision. But here scholarship faces an astonishing desideratum which this chapter will try to address, expanding on the previous comparative analysis of a religious (Hildegard) and a secular female writer (Marie). Surprisingly, this innovative experience found particularly strong recipients among European mystical women, one of whom will be the focus of this chapter: Hildegard of Bingen. Whereas this major mystical figure has been discussed before many times, and so also here in this book, the purpose of the present chapter is to elucidate the extent to which she was not only dealing with the apophatic, but also succeeded in coming to terms with it through the written word, empowering herself and her female correspondents, disregarding traditional gender divides and successfully assuming an authoritative voice on her own terms.

II. Medieval Mysticism

Mystical literature and the vast number of visionary accounts since the early Middle Ages have attracted much attention in recent years, especially if we think of monumental figures such as Hildegard of Bingen, Bernard of Clairvaux, Birgitta of Sweden, Meister Eckhart, Catharina of Siena, Julian of Norwich, Heinrich Seuse,

Wierlacher. *Kulturthemen*, 1 (Munich: iudicium, 1993); *Kulturthema Toleranz. Zur Grundlegung einer interdisziplinären und interkulturellen Toleranzforschung*, ed. Alois Wierlacher. *Kulturthemen*, 2 (Munich: iudicium, 1996). For a historical perspective, see the contributions to: *Annual of Medieval Studies at Central European University* 6 (2000); for a concrete case study of foreign phenomena, see Roger Bartra, *Wild Men in the Looking Glass. The Mythic Origins of European Otherness*, trans. Carl T. Berrisford (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

⁹ David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecutions of Minorities in the Middle Ages*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); *The Stranger in Medieval Society*, ed. F. R. P. Akehurst and Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden. *Medieval Cultures*, 12 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); *Other Middle Ages: Witnesses at the Margins of Medieval Society*, ed. Michael Goodich. *The Middle Ages Series* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400–1600* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988).

¹⁰ See, for example, *Demons: Mediators Between This World and the Other. Essays on Demonic Beings from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Ruth Petzold and Paul Neubauer *Beiträge zur Europäischen Ethnologie und Folklore. Reihe B: Tagungsberichte und Materialien*, 8. (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1998).

¹¹ Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Il Medioevo fantastico. Antichità ed esotismi nell'arte gotica*, introd. di Massimo Oldoni, trad. di F. Zuliani e F. Bovoli (1972; Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1973).

and Margery Kempe.¹² These mystical documents have been identified as highly valuable sources for the history of medieval theology, philosophy, mentality, the Christian Church, literature, music, and the visual arts. Moreover, through mystical literature we have also realized the dramatic impact that medieval women in fact exerted on the public and private life of their time despite the general notion of the Middle Ages as a world dominated by patriarchy.¹³

In the present paper I want to focus on Hildegard von Bingen exclusively for a number of reasons.¹⁴ Our understanding of her personal life, her political and religious role as the leader of her convent, her scholarship in the field of gynecology, herbal medicine, sexuality, astronomy, and other areas has been vastly expanded over the last ten to fifteen years. Before, during, or shortly after the nine hundredth anniversary of her birthday in 1997 many studies have appeared focused on this remarkable personality. Practically all of her texts are currently available both in exemplary critical editions and in English, German, French and other translations, and we are surprisingly well informed, insofar as this is possible with regard to any person from the Middle Ages, about her biography.¹⁵ More important, however, her mystical accounts provide detailed information about her revelations and the many confrontations with the Godhead which will allow us to gain a solid understanding of the medieval phenomenology of 'the Other' — here not so much in religious, but rather in epistemological terms. Finally, although Hildegard research has vastly grown over the last decades, there has never been any attempt to investigate the topic of 'Otherness' because the religious context of her life and visions does not seem to invite by itself the investigation of her perceptions of alterity in hermeneutic terms.

¹² *Wörterbuch der Mystik*, ed. Peter Dinzelbacher. Kröners Taschenausgabe, 456 (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1989), provides a comprehensive coverage of most aspects relevant to the topic 'mysticism' both past and present.

¹³ See, for example, *Frauenmystik im Mittelalter*, ed. Peter Dinzelbacher and Dieter R. Bauer. 2nd ed. (1985; Ostfildern bei Stuttgart: Schwabenverlag, 1990); *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1996); Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*. Studies in Medieval Mysticism, 3 (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Patricia Norwood, "Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179): A Case Study in Methodological Approaches to Medieval Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium," *Medieval Perspectives* 15, 2 (2000): 49–60.

¹⁵ Sabina Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098–1179. A Visionary Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989); Rosel Termolen, *Hildegard von Bingen Biographie* (Augsburg: Pattloch, 1990); *Hildegard von Bingen. Internationale wissenschaftliche Bibliographie*, ed. Marc-Aeilko Aris, Michael Embach, et al. Quellen und Abhandlungen zur mittelhochdeutschen Kirchengeschichte, 84. (Mainz: Selbstverlag der Gesellschaft für Mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte, 1998); the entry on "Hildegard of Bingen" in Mary Ellen Snodgrass's *Who's Who in the Middle Ages* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 2001), an otherwise rather superficial and not quite reliable reference work, proves to be one of the better articles, 119; Eberhard Horst, *Hildegard von Bingen: die Biographie*. 2nd ed. (Munich: Claassen, 2000).

Insofar as she was graced with enormous religious visions, which subsequently inspired her to have them written down on parchment, and to illustrate them with fascinating images, we can discover another layer of gender discourse, here epistemological in kind. Insofar as Hildegard was in such a power position as to have been exposed to divine revelations, she also gained, certainly due to a number of special circumstances, considerable public influence and authority. The encounter with 'the Other' subsequently thus proves to be the key catalyst for her, like for many other religious women, to find access to her own voice and to make this voice heard far and wide.

To proceed orderly, here I will use a number of key questions as guiding principles for my investigation: How does Hildegard understand and describe the process of crossing over from the material, human existence into the metaphysical realm? What does it mean for her as an individual to experience the encounter with the Godhead, and how does she explain her personal transgression into the 'Other World' to her readers/listeners? Finally, what does her effort to come to terms with the mystical visions mean for her as an author, seer, or perhaps even as a 'preacher'? All these questions support our final point of analysis, which again undergirds this entire study, that is, what role did she play as a woman writer, and what weight did her voice enjoy within the public discourse.

In her role as leader of her convent and teacher, as spiritual guide and mentor to her fellow sisters it was quite natural that Hildegard repeatedly dealt with the celestial realm and analyzed, for example, the hierarchy of angels.¹⁶ She also discussed her own visions in greatest details for both practical purposes (teaching) and as a way to relate her experiences to her audience.¹⁷ As Bernard McGinn observes, "Hildegard was unique in the way in which she combined the offices of visionary, prophet, and apocalyptic reformer, not least because of the conscious manner in which she reflected on each of these three aspects of her religious persona."¹⁸ Perhaps her uniqueness as a highly influential abbess and visionary, as scientist and composer, provided her with enough authority to assume the role of preacher and to participate in the public discourse on a wide array of topics.¹⁹

¹⁶ Heinrich Schipperges, "Die Engel im Weltbild Hildegards von Bingen," *Verbum et Signum. Beiträge zur mediävistischen Bedeutungsforschung (Festschrift Friedrich Ohly)*, ed. Hans Fromm, Wolfgang Harms, and Uwe Ruberg. 2 vols. (Munich: W. Fink, 1975), II, 99–117; Gunilla Iversen, "'O vos angeli'. Hildegard's Lyrical and Visionary Texts on the Celestial Hierarchies in the Context of Her Time," *"Im Angesicht Gottes suche der Mensch sich selbst": Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179)*, ed. Rainer Berndt. *Erudiri Sapientia*, II (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001), 87–113.

¹⁷ Constant J. Mews, "Hildegard, Visions and Religious Reform," *"Im Angesicht Gottes"*, 325–42.

¹⁸ Bernard McGinn, "Hildegard of Bingen as Visionary and Exegete," *Hildegard von Bingen in ihrem historischen Umfeld. Internationaler wissenschaftlicher Kongreß zum 900jährigen Jubiläum*, 13.–19. September 1998, *Bingen am Rhein*, ed. Alfred Haverkamp (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2000), 321–50, here 327.

¹⁹ *Hildegard of Bingen. A Book of Essays*. Ed. Maud Burnett McNerney. Garland Medieval Casebooks

Most important, however, both for her contemporary audiences and for us prove to be her personal experiences of mystical visions. These she started to have at the age of six, but it took her decades before she gained enough strength and inner confidence, supplied by a divine voice, to record these experiences in 1141: "Et ecce quadragesimo tertio temporalis cursus mei anno, cum caelesti uisioni magno timore et tremula intentione inhaererem, uidi maximum splendorem, in quo facta est uox de caelo ad me dicens:" ("And behold! In the forty-third year of my earthly course, as I was gazing with great fear and trembling attention at a heavenly vision, I saw a great splendor in which resounded a voice from Heaven, saying to me . . .").²⁰

The phenomenon of mystical vision itself does no longer need to be discussed and explained in great detail here, nor do we need to fight for the acknowledgment and recognition of mystical accounts as significant contributions both to medieval theology and literature, both to women's history and to poetry.²¹ This does not mean that we can claim to understand fully what mysticism means, as it will always remain an intellectual aporia, or a phenomenon of the ineffable, but mystics all over medieval Europe addressed a fundamental issue of the dialectics between selfhood versus 'Otherness' and gained profound recognition—if they were not condemned for preposterous claims of spiritual visions, such as Marguerite de Porete (Porette)²²—for their prophetic powers with which they succeeded to transgress the boundaries of human knowledge.²³

(New York and London: Garland, 1998).

²⁰ For the critical edition I will use *Scivias*, ed. Adelgundis Führkötter and Angela Carlevaris. Part One and Two. Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis, 43–43a (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1978), 3; the capitalization of special words is not reproduced here. For the English translation, see Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, transl. by Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop. Introduced by Barbara J. Newman. Preface by Caroline Walker Bynum (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), 59.

²¹ Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Peter Dinzelbacher, *Mittelalterliche Frauenmystik* (Paderborn, Munich, et al.: Schöningh, 1992); Eva Parra Membrives, *Mundos Femeninos Emancipados. Reconstrucción teórico-empiricó de una propuesta literaria femenina en la Edad Media alemana*. Textos de Filología, 5 (Zaragoza: Anubar, 1998); Elizabeth A. Andersen, *The Voices of Mechthild of Magdeburg* (Oxford, Bern, et al.: Peter Lang, 2000).

²² Margaret Porette, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, transl. from the French with an Introductory Interpretative Essay by Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., J. C. Marler, and Judith Grant and a Foreword by Kent Emery, Jr. Notre Dame Texts in Medieval Cultures, 6 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

²³ Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Sonya Sikka, *Forms of Transcendence: Heidegger and Medieval Mystical Theology*. SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

III. The Meeting with the Godhead as the Ultimate 'Otherness'

During the entire Middle Ages people were almost always confronted by other cultures and religions despite the intensive efforts by the Catholic Church to implement a completely homogenous society based on the one and only religious belief. Consequently it would be a gross misrepresentation of that age to assume that it was a world entirely dominated by Christianity and white people living in harmony with each other.²⁴ Throughout the centuries there were imminent threats of and contacts with Huns, Saracens (Arabs), Jews, Vikings, Mongols, Tartars, Slavs, and even Indians. There is no way to determine medieval European identity in a simple manner, as medieval history was constantly plagued by military conflicts between the various cultures and peoples, not to mention the fundamental conflicts among the religions, or sometimes even disturbing confrontations with members of unorthodox sects.²⁵ These mostly hostile contacts led to a vast storehouse of literary and art historical documents all of which somehow dealt with the issue of 'Otherness.' These contacts with representatives of other cultures, however, do not concern me here. Instead, Hildegard's visions provide the essential background for a new exploration of what 'the Other' also meant for medieval people from a philosophical and religious perspective.²⁶ This promises to yield particularly intriguing insights as there could be nothing more alien and yet more familiar at the same time than a personal experience with the Godhead.

People from other races, strange animals, unexplainable natural phenomena, and terrifying landscapes or bodies of water could always inspire fear and rejection, but they all fell under well-established categories of human and natural

²⁴ *Toleranz und Intoleranz im Mittelalter. VIII. Jahrestagung der Reineke-Gesellschaft (Toledo, 14.05.–20.05. 1997)*, ed. Danielle Buschinger and Wolfgang Spiewok. Wodan, 74 (Greifswald: Reineke Verlag, 1997).

²⁵ *The Meetings of Two Worlds. Cultural Exchanges between East and West during the Period the Crusades*, ed. Vladimir P. Goss and Christine Verzár Bornstein. Studies in Medieval Culture, XXI (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1986); Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Europe, 300–1000*. Second ed. History of Europe (1991; Houndsmill, Basingstoke, and New York: Palgrave, 1999), 309ff., et passim; for the amazing amalgamation of peoples during the late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, see Patrick J. Geary, "Barbarians and Ethnicity," *Interpreting Late Antiquity*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 107–129. For conflicts with sects and other groups within the same religion, see Elka Weber, *Traveling Through Text: Message and Method in Late Medieval Pilgrimage Accounts*. Studies in Medieval History and Culture (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 129–37. See also *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*, ed. James Muldoon (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1997).

²⁶ For an introduction to her *Scivias* and many other aspects of Hildegard's life and work, now see: *Hildegard von Bingen 1098–1179*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Kotzur (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1998), especially 209–211.

epistemology. The confrontation with the divine voice, however, represents the ultimate alterity for which there exists no human or material vehicle of comprehension.²⁷

Although Hildegard adamantly resisted the divine call to divulge her visionary experiences for many years, terrified or too awe-struck herself, in 1141 she witnessed a fiery light that forced her to come forward and transgress the long-guarded barrier between herself and lay society. Hildegard was told to put into writing her visions although her human abilities in expressing her new understanding was, as the other voice emphasizes, highly limited: "scribe illa non secundum os hominis nec secundum intellectum humane adinventionis nec secundum uoluntatem humane compositionis" (3; "write these things not by a human mouth, and not by the understanding of human intervention, and not by the requirements of human composition;" 59).

Mystical revelations have nothing in common with human knowledge and human abilities; instead they force the individual to experience such revelations and thereby to transgress the limits of all worldly categories. As the divine voice tells Hildegard, the barriers between human and divine knowledge are not fully surmountable, and all attempts to reach the divinity would be futile if the voice from the other dimension would not come forward by its own volition. Moreover, even putting into written words what she had seen would not do justice to the otherworldly power of the Godhead if the latter were not willing to make itself known to the human audience. The key passage, already cited above, plays such an important role in the full understanding of Hildegard's and most other mystics' self-concept that it deserves to be repeated here: "et scribe ea non secundum te nec secundum alium hominem, sed secundum uoluntatem scientis, uidentis et disponentis omnia in secretis mysteriorum suorum" (3). Most interesting, the mystic relates to us the manner in which it was possible for her to reach the shore of the spiritual world by dint of intensive gazing. Her fear seems fully understandable as she is suddenly confronted with the Godhead itself and is told that her vision will not be communicable to her contemporaries in the way how people usually inform others about their experiences of a mundane kind. Hildegard is told to pursue different paths in her efforts to formulate the visions: "secundum id quod ea in caelestibus desuper in mirabilibus Dei uides et audis" (3; "as you see and hear them on high in the heavenly places in the wonders of;" 59).²⁸

²⁷ For a postmodern perspective which not everyone might want to agree with, see Ulrike Wiethaus, *Ecstatic Transformation: Transpersonal Psychology in the Works of Mechthild of Magdeburg* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996); cf. also Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart*. Studies in Spirituality and Theology, 1 (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

²⁸ For a parallel case study, see Valérie Galent-Fasseur, "Dieu, soi-même et l'autre: l'énergique de la

Moreover, the fundamental transgression implied in her account pertains to the abandonment of her own will and identity, as the Godhead assumes complete control of her soul and mind: "et scribe ea non secundum te nec secundum alium hominem, sed secundum uoluntatem scientis, uidentis et disponentis omnia in secretis mysteriorum suorum" (3; "write them not by yourself or any other human being, but by the will of Him Who knows, sees and disposes all things in the secrets of His mysteries;" 59).

Hildegard demonstrates great concern for the process of building a bridge to 'the Other,' here the Godhead, for which there are no clear terms available, but which nevertheless forces her to go far beyond her own self. As in all cases of mystical revelations, the visionary has to worry about the ability of her or his audience to comprehend and especially to believe the mystical account after the return from the world of spirituality. Consequently Hildegard at first focuses on her own biography and the concrete, pragmatic circumstances under which she was graced with her visions. Not to be accused of making false statements, she emphasizes: "Visiones uero quas uidi, non eas in somnis, nec dormiens, nec in phrenesi, nec corporeis oculis aut auribus exterioris hominis, nec in abditis locis percepi, sed eas uigilans et circumspecta in pura mente, oculis et auribus interioris hominis, in apertis locis, secundum uoluntatem Dei accepi" (4; "But the visions I saw I did not perceive in dreams, or sleep, or delirium, or by the eyes of the body, or by the ears of the outer self, or in hidden places; but I received them while awake and seeing with a pure mind and the eyes and ears of the inner self, in open places, as God willed it;" 60).²⁹

IV. Hildegard's Revelations

As the introductory remarks indicate, the creation of her *Scivias* was the result of a long-term history of visionary experiences since her sixth year of age, and the establishment of a 'critical mass' leading to the revolutionary breakthrough of a pentecostal kind, allowing Hildegard not only to gain full spiritual knowledge of the Godhead, but also to acquire the necessary strength to write about her visions. She was not entirely left on her own in the composition of her account; instead she had, over the years, several scribes at her disposal, and she also received a thorough theological and literary education. Certainly, she and her scribes culled

conversion dans la *Vita Coetana* de Ramon Llull," *Toleranz und Intoleranz*, 35–45.

²⁹ Hildegard's strategy is paralleled by many other mystics, such as Mechthild of Magdeburg; see Katharina Bochsler, "Ich han da inne ungehoertu ding gesehen". *Die Jenseitsvisionen Mechthilds von Magdeburg in der Tradition der mittelalterlichen Visionsliteratur*. Deutsche Literatur von den Anfängen bis 1700, 23 (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 1997), 12–19.

some models from traditional visionary, apocalyptic, scholastic encyclopedic literature (*summae*), from the texts by the Church Fathers or the Old and the New Testament, but this observation does not diminish the spiritual quality and message of her visionary account. Rather, it confirms that Hildegard was an extraordinary writer on her own terms and freely utilized the widest range of literary genres in order to formulate her most unusual, almost frightening experiences.³⁰

As she informs us in the prologue to her *Scivias*, according to the divine voice only special people are chosen to be graced with the visionary encounter, as the personal qualifications demand a thorough preparation and a spiritually strengthened mind: "Nam rimas cordis eius circumsaepsi, ne mens ipsius per superbiam aut per gloriam se eleuaret, sed ut magis in omnibus his timorem et dolorem quam gaudium aut quam petulantiam haberet" (5; "For I have closed up the cracks in her heart that her mind may not exalt itself in pride or vainglory, but may feel fear and grief rather than joy and wantonness;" 60). In fact, Hildegard does not even use her own voice; instead she considers herself only as God's mouthpiece when reflecting the divine words: "Tenensque eum simul cum illo in omnibus his per supernum studium contendit, ut absconsa miracula mea reuelarentur" (5; "And, holding fast to him, she worked with him in great zeal so that My hidden miracles might be revealed;" 60), which is followed by the specific command to begin writing down her visions. Only then do we hear Hildegard's own voice again, this time explaining why it took her so long to get to work, as she "tamen propter dubietatem et malam opinionem et propter diuersitatem uerborum hominum, tamdiu non in pertinacia, sed in humilitatis officio scribere recusauit" (5; "refused to write for a long time through doubt and bad opinion and the diversity of human words;" 60).

On the one hand she felt a strong sense of insecurity and questioned her role and ability to report to her fellow sisters and the laity of her revelations. On the other, however, she points out the inadequacy of the human language to do real justice to the revelations and the encounter with the Godhead, which is regularly expressed by many mystics who all struggled hard in coping with the exigencies of the apophatic discourse.³¹ Moreover, Hildegard admits her feeling of being in

³⁰ Michael Zöller, "Aufschein des Neuen im Alten. Das Buch *Scivias* der Hildegard von Bingen im geistesgeschichtlichen Kontext des zwölften Jahrhunderts — eine gattungsspezifische Einordnung," *Hildegard von Bingen in ihrem historischen Umfeld*, 271–97.

³¹ Peter Dronke, "Hildegard's Inventions: Aspects of Her Language and Imagery," *Hildegard von Bingen in ihrem historischen Umfeld*, 299–320; for a broad overview of the impact of the mystics on the development of the German language, see Hans Eggers, *Deutsche Sprachgeschichte*. Vol. 1: *Das Althochdeutsche und das Mittelhochdeutsche* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1986), 461–83; Udo Kühne, "Die Konstruktion prophetischen Sprechens: Hildegards Sicht der eigenen Rolle als Autorin," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 46, 1–2 (1999): 67–78.

a shock, if not even being overwhelmed by the 'Otherness' of the Godhead, as she faces serious difficulties coming to terms with the divine dimension where human knowledge and reason have no role to play. Consequently the Godhead has to soothe her and urge her to let all her premises go and accept the divine 'Otherness' as is: "o homo, qui haec non in inquietudine deceptionis, sed in puritate simplicitatis accipis ad manifestationem absconditorum directa, scribe quae uides et audis" (5; O human, who receives these things meant to manifest what is hidden not in the disquiet of deception but in the purity of simplicity, write, therefore, the things you and hear; 60). Herein, however, lies the greatest problem for the mystic, as she witnesses the divine completely unmediated, starkly confronted by an unexplainable experience, and yet she is asked to convey it to her audience outside of the vision.³²

Not surprisingly, as Hildegard admits, she struggled for a long time against the divine charge which she explains through her "ascensione humilitatis" (5; exercise of humility; 60), until she was forced by God to follow his orders because serious sicknesses befell her when she initially refused. The presence of the 'Otherness' made itself known through a loss of bodily control, intimately linking the mystical revelation with the absence of physical identity.³³ Intriguingly, the writing process itself proved to be the decisive factor for recovering her strength and regaining her health: "de aegritudine me erigens, uix opus istud decem annis consummans ad finem perduxi" (6; "raising myself from illness by the strength I received;" 61), as it diminished the distance between herself and the mystical phenomenon, or between her soul and the unexplainably 'other' Godhead,³⁴ especially as she is suddenly approached personally: "o homo, qui haec . . . accipis" (5; "O human, who receives these things;" 60).

When we turn to Hildegard's actual text, we are offered quite a different perspective in her handling of the mystical experience. Whereas the prologue gives us a taste of the immediate contact with the Godhead, the first vision proves to be a rather sober account of what she actually saw, as if she were describing a dream image: "Vidi qvasi montem magnum ferreum colorem habentem, et super ipsum quendam tantae claritatis sedentem, ut claritas ipsius uisum meum

³² The same phenomenon can be observed in Meister Eckhart's sermons which are explicitly determined by an apophatic discourse and where this dialectic approach is developed much more consciously; see Bruce Milem's excellent study: *The Unspoken Word. Negative Theology in Meister Eckhart's German Sermons* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002).

³³ For theoretical, historical, and literary investigations of this phenomenon, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

³⁴ For a parallel case study on the relationship between the divine logos and human writing in mystical discourse, see Catherine Müller, "How to Do Things with Mystical Language: Marguerite d'Oingt's Performative Writing," *Performance and Transformation. New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality*, ed. Mary A. Suydam and Joanna E. Ziegler (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999, 27–45).

reuerberaret" (7; "I saw a great mountain the color of iron, and enthroned on it One of such great glory that it blinded my sight;" 67). The parallels, however, are striking, as she observes a phenomenon of natural dimensions, and then faces the Godhead whose sight blinds her. Hildegard's gaze is penetrating and yet limited, as the visual aspect provides only fragmentary explanation.³⁵ Despite her serious efforts to cast this vision in concrete images that would be understandable to the uninitiated, she has to reveal to her audience the ultimate barrier between the human soul and the Godhead, unless the former is graced with a revelation as well: "Nam tu acumen huius profunditatis ab homine non capis, sed a superno et tremendo iudice illud desuper accipis, ubi praeclara luce haec serenitas inter lucentes fortiter lucebit" (8; "For you have received your profound insight not from humans, but from the lofty and tremendous Judge on high, where this calmness will shine strongly with glorious light among the shining ones;" 67).³⁶

Hildegard was not content with this simple reflection; instead she immediately turned to her role as teacher and offered detailed explanations, fully aware of the rational incomprehensibility of the images she saw in her vision: "ut uides, mons iste magnus ferreum colorem habens designat fortitudinem et stabilitatem aeternitatis regni Dei" (8; "As you see, therefore, *the great mountain the color of iron* symbolizes the strength and stability of the eternal Kingdom of God;" 67). Nevertheless, she also emphasizes that regular people cannot succeed in comprehending the Godhead, irrespective of all their efforts, since the human mind proves to be too weak for this effort. But she herself had transgressed this limit and had been graced with a vision beyond all human intelligence, which consequently allowed her to describe the undescribable, the key operation in apophatic discourse.

V. Hildegard as Witness and Teacher

Hildegard boldly assumed the role of a prophet and felt empowered enough to preach to her contemporaries, whether orally or in written form as here in her *Scivias*.³⁷ Fully aware of the dangerous position she claimed within the Church and

³⁵ Elisabeth Gössmann, *Hildegard von Bingen. Versuche einer Annäherung*. Archiv für Philosophie- und Theologiegeschichtliche Frauenforschung, Sonderband (Munich: iudicium, 1995), 94–96.

³⁶ Cf. Michael Camille, "Visionary Perception and Images of the Apocalypse in the Later Middle Ages," *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Kenneth Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 276–89; *Die Vermittlung geistlicher Inhalte im deutschen Mittelalter, internationales Symposium. Roscrea 1994*, ed. Timothy R. Jackson, Nigel F. Palmer, Almut Suerbaum (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996); Peter Dinzelsbacher, *Die letzten Dinge: Himmel, Hölle, Fegefeuer* (Freiburg: Herder, 1999).

³⁷ Christian-Frederik Felksau, "Von Brabant bis Böhmen und darüber hinaus. Zu Einheit und Vielfalt

in public, she relied on the biblical model of the prophet who could transgress traditional power structures and church hierarchies and reach out to people directly.³⁸ In fact, Hildegard assumed the role of the intermediary between the Godhead and regular lay people as she regularly revealed to the latter her visions, and then expounded them in great detail. She obviously knew that her visions remain enigmatic because of their obscure imagery: “Deinde vidi uelut maximam multitudinem uiuentium lampadarum multam claritatem habentium, quae igneum fulgorem accipientes ita serenissimum splendorem adeptae sunt” (13; “Then I saw as it were a great multitude of very bright living lamps, which received fiery brilliance and acquired an unclouded splendor;” 73). She could barely make out some human form, but this form is expelled from a particular “clara regione candidam” (13; “region of brightness;” 73). As soon as this event has happened, Hildegard witnessed great turmoil and such a transformation that she remained almost speechless at this sight: “lucidissimus splendor eandem regionem circumdedit, et ita omnia elementa mundi, quae prius in magna quiete constiterant, in maximam inquietudinem uersa horribilis terrores ostenderunt” (13; “a luminous splendor surrounded that region, and all the elements of the world, which before had existed in great calm, were turned to the greatest agitation and displayed horrible terrors;” 73).

The use of Biblical imagery pertaining to Hell and the Apocalypse is self-evident, but we still need to analyze the procedure through which Hildegard built connections to the ‘Otherness’ of the divine and/or hellish phenomena.³⁹ The author puts herself in the forefront of the discussion: “Deinde vidi uelut . . .” (13; “Then I saw as it were;” 73). Next she makes room for the Godhead to speak: “Et iterum audiui illum qui mihi prius locutus fuerat dicentem” (13; “And again I heard Him Who had spoken to me before;” 73). Subsequently it is her own turn to explain all of this, and here she relies on both her biblical training and her visionary experiences. Obviously, her discussion is characterized by a theoretical discourse through which she analyzes each individual feature and offers a

der ‘religiösen Frauenbewegung’ des 12. und des 13. Jahrhunderts,” *Fromme Frauen – unbequeme Frauen?: Weibliches Religiosentum im Mittelalter*, ed. Edeltraud Klueting, Hildesheimer Forschungen. Tagungs- und Forschungsberichte aus der Dombibliothek Hildesheim, 3 (Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York: Georg Olms, 2006), 67–103; here 69–70.

³⁸ Anne H. King-Lenzmeier, *Hildegard of Bingen. An Integrated Vision* (Collegeville, MS: Liturgical Press, 2001), 146–61.

³⁹ Similar elements, sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker, can also be found in many of her other texts, even in her correspondence, as illustrated by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, “Prophet and Reformer. ‘Smoke in the Vineyard,’” *Voice of the Living Light. Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, ed. Barbara Newman (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1998), 70–90; as to the imagination of Hell in the Middle Ages and visionary reflections upon it, see, for example, Peter Dinkelbacher, *Himmel, Hölle, Heilige. Visionen und Kunst im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2002).

theologically well-founded explanation, through which she establishes intriguing bridges between her listeners/readers and the Divine.

Despite her role as a visionary prophet, Hildegard remained highly circumspect in her self-criticism and repeatedly made serious efforts to provide more explanations to gain also secular authority after the Godhead had already graced her with the highest honor. In a letter to the monk Guibert, which was later included in her *Vita Sanctae Hildegardis*, in its final version edited by Theodoric of Echternach (d. 1192), she clearly states:

Ab infantia autem mea ossibus et neruis ac uenis meis nondum confortatis uisionem hanc in anima mea usque ad presens tempus semper uideo, cum iam plus quam septuaginta annorum sim; animaeque mea, prout Deus uult, in hac uisione sursum in altitudinem firmamenti et in uicissitudinem diuersi aeris ascendit atque inter diuersos populos se dilatat, quamuis in longinquis regionibus et locis a me remoti sint.⁴⁰

[Still, I have always seen this vision in my soul, even from my infancy, when my bones and nerves and veins had not yet grown strong, up to the present time, though I am now more than seventy years of age. And in this vision my soul, as God wills it, ascends to the height of the vault and the shifting patterns of the variable air, and spreads itself out over the various peoples, though they are in distant regions and places far away from me.]

Moreover, to dispel any doubts on Guibert's part, she reconfirms her many declarations from earlier times:

Ista autem nec exterioribus oculis uideo nec exterioribus auribus audio nec cogitationibus cordis mei nec ulla collatione quinque sensuum meorum percipio, sed tantum in anima mea apertis exterioribus oculis, ita quod numquam in eis defectum extasis passa sum, sed uigilanter die ac nocte ea uideo (15).

[I do not see these things with my outward eyes or hear them with my outward ears or perceive them with the thoughts of my heart or through any contribution of the five senses, but only in my soul, for my outward eyes remain open, and I do not undergo the unconsciousness of ecstasy, but see them wide awake, by day and by night].⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Vita Sanctae Hildegardis*, ed. Monca Klaes. *Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis*, CXXVI (Turnholt: Brepols, 1993), 14–15.

⁴¹ The translation is quoted from: Anna Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources*. Brepols Medieval Women Series (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 150; on Theodoric's biography, see Walter Berschin, "Die Vita Sanctae Hildegardis des Theoderich von Echternach. Ihre Stellung in der biographischen Tradition," *Hildegard von Bingen: Prophetin durch die Zeiten. Zum 900. Geburtstag*, ed. Edeltraud Forster (Freiburg, Basel, and Vienna: Herder, 1997), 120–25; for comparable cases, see Margot Schmidt, "Elemente der Schau bei Mechthild von Magdeburg und Mechthild von Hackeborn. Zur Bedeutung der geistlichen Sinne," *Frauenmystik im Mittelalter*, 123–51.

Whereas the initial reaction to her vision proves to be entirely alienating, the subsequent examination establishes intriguing bridges between human existence and the divine 'Otherness.' But Hildegard was obviously so self-assured of her empowerment through God that she calmly related the images in her visions utilizing passages from the Old Testament, as she refers, for example, to a passage in Job (21:17–18). Subsequently she argued from a position of highest authority and claimed the privilege of speaking on behalf of God to her lay audience, as she had transgressed the limits of human beings and had witnessed the absolute 'Other.'⁴² One of many examples would be her admonishment to her listeners/readers who questioned why God allowed man to be liable to commit sins: "o stulti homines, hoc quod ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei factum est, quomodo sine probatione posset subsistere? Nam homo super omnem creaturam examinandus est, et ideo per omnem creaturam expurgandus est" (33; "O foolish humans, how can that which was made in the image and likeness of God exist without testing? For Man must be examined more than any other creature, and therefore he must be tested through every other creature;" 87). In other words, although deeply inspired by her visionary experience, Hildegard never forgets her secular duties as a teacher and successfully crosses the boundaries between human existence and the world of the Divine back and forth.

VI. Approaches to the Divine Other

Let us analyze this phenomenon a little closer. The fundamental organizational principle of Hildegard's *Scivias* proves to be a two-fold system; after the description of her mystical visions follows a highly detailed explanation, as the mystic suddenly transforms into a teacher and one of the highest representatives of the Church, though in her case more or less self-appointed because traditionally women were excluded from the priesthood. Just as in the case of many other mystics, Hildegard achieved her goal of relating her ineffable revelations by moving from her stage within her vision where she encounters the Godhead back to her old self where she is faced by intensive questioning, forcing her to accept her role as teacher and preacher.⁴³ She considered herself, as John Van Engen observes, "a divinely charged guide for her religious women, not a lady assuming

⁴² Though from the opposite perspective, focusing on the 'evil' or 'dark' figure, the contributors to *The Dark Figure in Medieval German and Germanic Literature*, ed. by Edward R. Haymes and Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 448 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1986), provide useful concepts and ideas about transgressions of hermeneutic limits. The issue of 'mysticism', however, was not addressed here.

⁴³ Emily Greisinger, "'Your Daughters Shall Prophesy': The Charismatic Spirituality of Hildegard of Bingen," *Christian Scholar's Review* 29, 1 (1999): 25–47.

the social privileges of an 'abbess.'"⁴⁴ Undoubtedly, her own visions played a major role for Hildegard in pragmatic and political terms because they provided her with the required authority to ascend to the Otherworld where she could meet the Godhead. Only through these visions was she empowered and enabled to preach, explain, advise, and counsel her fellow sisters and the laity, but it remained an enormous difficulty for her to express in human terms the reality of her revelations.⁴⁵

The introductory passage to her third vision powerfully illustrates this point, as here she tries to provide a small window into her world of visions and to convey to her audience the actual appearance of the Godhead, an effort contradictory in itself: "Post haec uidi maximum instrumentum rotundum et umbrosum secundum similitudinem oui, superius artum et in medio amplum ac inferius constrictum, in cuius exteriori parte per circuitum lucidus ignis fuit, quasi pellem umbrosam sub se habens" (40; "After this I saw a vast instrument, round and shadowed, in the shape of an egg, small at the top, large in the middle and narrowed at the bottom; outside it, surrounding its circumference, there was bright fire with, as it were, a shadowy zone under it;" 93). Here we are given the first insights into Hildegard's dialectical concept of macrocosm and microcosm, which has attracted much discussion by theological scholars,⁴⁶ particularly because the mystic transgressed all traditional gender roles and assumed a central position within the Church.⁴⁷ As Theodoric of Echternach (d. 1192) emphasized in his *Vita Sanctae Hildegardis*, "quia ab actiua uita, quam apprehenderat, ad quolibet infima non reuertebatur, et a contemplatiua, quam carne obsita iugiter tenere non poterat, in actiuam uitam reuertebatur" ("Hildegard herself would not turn back from the active life, which she knew well, to anything of a baser nature. On the other hand, she could not remain absorbed in the contemplative life, for she was still bound to the body").⁴⁸

For our purposes, however, the most intriguing aspects prove to be the intricate relationship between the gazing mystic and the Godhead itself, and the

⁴⁴ John Van Engen, "Mother and Teacher," *Voice of the Living Light. Hildegard of Bingen and her World*, ed. Barbara Newman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 30–51, here 42.

⁴⁵ Peter Dronke, "Sibylla - Hildegardis. Hildegard und die Rolle der Sibylle," *Hildegard von Bingen. Prophetin durch die Zeiten. Zum 900. Geburtstag*, ed. Edeltraud Forster, 1997, 109–18.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Regine Kather, "Vollendetes Kunstwerk Gottes. Das kosmische Weltbild Hildegards von Bingen," *Hildegard von Bingen. Prophetin durch die Zeiten*, 198–210; Josef Sudbrack, *Hildegard von Bingen: Schau der kosmischen Ganzheit* (Würzburg: Echter, 1995); Ruth Finckh, *Minor Mundus Homo: Studien zur Mikrokosmos-Idee in der mittelalterlichen Literatur*. Palaestra, 306 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 200–250.

⁴⁷ Joop van Banning, SJ, "Hildegard von Bingen als Theologin in ihren Predigten," *Im Angesicht Gottes*, 243–268.

⁴⁸ Quoted from *Vita Sanctae Hildegardis*, 15; the English translation is taken from Anna Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard*, 150.

hermeneutic bridge that existed between them. Hildegard underscores over and over again that she perceived her vision through her inner eyes: “Sed sub eadem pelle purissimus aether erat, sub se nullam pellem habens, in quo etiam quendam globum candentis ignis plurimaeque magnitudinis uidebam, super se duas faculas sursum clare positas habentem” (40; “But beneath that zone was purest ether, with no zone beneath it, and in it I saw a globe of white fire and great magnitude over which two little torches were placed;” 93).⁴⁹ Once she has completed her specific account, which in itself at first is always limited only to herself as the observer, she widens this perspective and relates to us that the Godhead spoke to her: “Audiuique iterum uocem de caelo dicentem mihi” (41; “And again I heard the voice from Heaven, saying to me;” 94).⁵⁰ Most fascinating, Hildegard then immediately occupies this voice for her own purposes and presents herself as God’s mouthpiece, with the peculiar but not unexpected qualification that the divine words require Hildegard’s interpretation.

In fact, each individual word, image, or phrase constituting the visions receives particular attention and is meticulously analyzed, as Hildegard, both as teacher and abbess, identifies herself as a medium between lay people and the Godhead. On one hand she resorts to highly fantastic imagery and offers details of a most unusual fashion, unless we take into account Apocalyptic and other forms of biblical language.⁵¹ Even though the mystic admits that she could not even tolerate the view of some elements of her vision which might have pertained to the area of Hell — “In eadem quoque pelle quidam tenebrosus ignis tanti horroris erat quod eum intueri non poteram” (40; “In that zone, too, there was a dark fire of such great horror that I could not look at it;” 93) — she certainly establishes powerful bridges first between herself and the Godhead, and then between the audience and the divine sphere. On the other hand, as soon as she has presented her vision, Hildegard brings to an end the immediacy of the partially horrifying scenario and begins with her analysis. In other words, the mystical account is characterized by a regular shift from the apophatic discourse to the material one, and each discourse is determined by different communication partners.

⁴⁹ See the comprehensive study by Michael Zöller, *Gott weist seinem Volk seine Wege. Die theologische Konzeption des “Liber Scivias” der Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179)*. Tübinger Studien zur Theologie und Philosophie, 11 (Tübingen and Basel: Francke, 1997).

⁵⁰ There are significant parallels to Hildegard’s later visionary account, her *Liber divinorum operum* (*Book of Divine Works*), written between 1163 and 1174; see Sabine Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen*, 141–57; Ruth Finckh, *Minor Mundus Homo*, 1999, 200–250.

⁵¹ The same strategy was applied by Heinrich von dem Türlin in his *Diu Crône* (ca. 1230) where the protagonist Gawein experiences a series of dumbfounding visions for which he finds no rational explanations. Most recently, see Neil Thomas, *Diu Crône and the Medieval Arthurian Cycle*. Arthurian Studies, 50 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 58–71. Research on *Diu Crône* has never even considered the possibility of parallels in imagery and language between this late-medieval Arthurian romance and mystical literature.

In particular, Hildegard reflects on herself with regard to the vision she had experienced, then she is also involved in a direct exchange with the Godhead, and finally she turns to her human listeners and readers and offers them an exegesis of her vision. Through these binary oppositions between herself and the Godhead the mystical visionary empowers herself to cross almost with ease from the world of spirituality back into the world of her human existence, and reverse.⁵² By way of this rather complex process Hildegard establishes surprisingly easy bridges between the laity and the Godhead and allows the uninitiated and unenlightened persons among her audience to accompany her on her journey to the highest goal of the religious experience.

Indeed, considering her accomplishments both in theoretical/spiritual and pragmatic terms, which she achieved through her intensive writing (correspondence and mystical treatises) and her multiple travels during which she preached to large masses—first between 1158 and 1159, next in 1160, the third time between 1161 and 1163, and finally from 1170 to 1171⁵³—we would be justified to identify her, and this as a woman, as one of the most significant theologians of her time.⁵⁴ This significance, however, rests not only in her visionary account, in her leadership as the head of her convent, and in her contributions to music, medicine, and botany. Most important, rather, seem to be her powerful struggles to establish a communicative link between the Godhead who presented Itself to her in an uninterrupted flow of revelations, and her lay audience. But would we be really justified to qualify this aspect as the perhaps most influential component in Hildegard's life and work?

VII. Mysticism as Theological Epistemology

To answer this ultimate question we need to return to our initial considerations concerning the interconnection between mysticism and xenology, or the study of epistemological alterity. To illustrate the crucial aspect of Hildegard's mysticism, let us turn to the fourth vision in *Scivias*. Here she appears to have penetrated ever deeper into the secrets of the Divinity, as she states: "Et deinde uidi maximum serenissimumque splendorem uelut plurimis oculis flammantem, quattuorque

⁵² Albrecht Classen, "Flowing Light of the Godhead. Binary Oppositions of Self and God in Mechthild von Magdeburg," *Studies in Spirituality* 7 (1997): 79–98.

⁵³ Rosel Termolen, *Hildegard von Bingen Biographie*, 1990, 231–40.

⁵⁴ Curiously, perhaps because she was a woman, Hildegard is not included in such volumes as: *Theologen des Mittelalters. Eine Einführung*, ed. Ulrich Köpf (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2002); for a much more balanced view, see Valerie M. Lagorio, "The Medieval Continental Women Mystics," *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 161–93; here 163–66.

angulos ad quattuor partes mundi uersos habentem, qui secretum superni creatoris designans in maximo mysterio mihi manifestatus est; in quo etiam alius splendor similis aurorae in se purpurei fulgoris claritatem tenens apparuit" (61; "Then I saw a most great and serene splendor, flaming, as it were, with many eyes, with four corners pointing toward the four parts of the world, which was manifest to me in the greatest mystery to show me the secret of the Supernal Creator; and in it appeared another splendor like the dawn, containing in itself a brightness of purple lightning;" 109). The images she uses appear to be just mere shadows of her real vision, but the limited power of the human language restricted Hildegard in formulating her observations in any other fashion. The way how she visualizes the Godhead, however, indicates already two major components of epistemological transgression leading to the ultimate 'Other': first, the confrontation with the Godhead can only be described in extremely vivid images derived from more or less familiar human territory, and yet, second, the true intellectual realization of its nature and essence remains an impossibility. Nevertheless, Hildegard made repeated efforts to hold on to the vision and to translate it into images somehow understandable by normal people, especially when she reflects upon her ultimate encounter with the Godhead: "Deine vidi serenissimam lucem et in ipsa sapphirini coloris speciem hominis, quae tota suauiissimo rutilante igne flagrabat. Et illa serena lux perfudit totum illum rutilantem ignem, et ille rutilans ignis totam illam serenam lucem" (124; "Then I saw a bright light, and in this light the figure of a man the color of a sapphire, which was all blazing with a gentle glowing fire. And that bright light bathed the whole of the glowing fire, and the glowing fire bathed the bright light;" 161).⁵⁵

Oliver Sacks once identified Hildegard's ecstatic mysticism, approaching it from a psycho-medical perspective, as a "privileged consciousness, the substrate of a supreme ecstatic inspiration."⁵⁶ Although her mystical discourse at times sounds rather didactic and pedantic when she explains each individual feature of her vision in theological terms, she powerfully reached out to her audience and allowed it to share in the magnificence of her experience for which no true human words are available (apophasis). Not surprisingly, in order to come to terms with the absolute alterity of the Godhead the mystic mostly relied on strong images connected with light and fire that allow for an inner spirituality to awake within the spectator but do not yet reveal the actual secrets, as Hildegard herself indicates

⁵⁵ Anne H. King-Lenzmeier, *Hildegard of Bingen. An Integrated Vision*, 18, speaks of a "double-vision" characterizing Hildegard's mystical vision.

⁵⁶ Oliver Sacks, *Migraine: Understanding a Common Disorder*, rev. and expanded (London: Picador, 1993), here quoted from: Fiona Maddocks, *Hildegard of Bingen. The Woman of Her Age* (New York, London, et al.: Doubleday, 2001), 64.

in her comment: "Hic est sensus mysteriorum Dei, ut discrete cernatur et intellegatur quae sit plenitudo illa quae numquam uisa est in ortu et in qua nullus defectus est illi acutae fortitudini quae plantauit omnes riuulos fortium" (124; "This is the perception of God's mysteries, whereby it can be distinctly perceived and understood what is that Fullness, Whose origin was never seen, and in Which that lofty strength never fails that founded all the sources of strength;" 161).⁵⁷ Almost in a dialectical fashion, however, she does not unveil the essence of the Godhead; instead she emphasizes that "Ideoque in pleno opere cernitur quis fabricator sit" (124; "in the whole work it is perceived Who the Maker is;" 161).

Intriguingly, Hildegard placed herself in the center of her own vision, as many other female mystics did likewise, such as when she later reports that she saw herself as God's bride who approached Christ while hanging on the cross: "et sanguine qui de latere eius fluxit se sursum eleuante perfusa ipsi per uoluntatem superni Patris felici desponsatione associata est atque carne et sanguine eius nobiliter dotata" (230, "she was sprinkled by the blood from His side; and thus, by the will of the Heavenly Father, she was joined with Him in happy betrothal and nobly dowered with His body and blood;" 237). Moreover, she also reported that God Himself appointed her as His son's bride, meaning that she was considered a mother to the people, "animas per saluationem spiritus et aquae regenerans" (230; "generating souls through the salvation of the Spirit and water;" 237).⁵⁸ There are numerous parallels to this imagery, as many mystics such as Mechthild von Magdeburg, Birgitta of Sweden, and Julian of Norwich identified themselves in this maternal imagery, creating pragmatic links between their spiritual experience and their subsequent audiences.⁵⁹ But Hildegard was one of the earliest medieval visionaries and offered some of the profoundest insights in the totality of God's creation by clearly projecting a dialectic of macrocosm and microcosm with man/woman as the crown of creation. Through Hildegard's visionary account this dialectic universe is briefly brought close to the viewer who acquires, by dint of the mystic's explanations, new understanding of the

⁵⁷ Viki Ranff, *Wege zu Wissen und Weisheit. Eine verborgene Philosophie bei Hildegard von Bingen*. Mystik in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Texte und Untersuchungen. Abt. I: Christliche Mystik, 17 (Stuttgart and Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2001), 124–25, identifies this phenomenon as Hildegard's characteristic "sciencia und sapientia," or as "speculativa scientia."

⁵⁸ Elisabeth Gössmann, "Zur theologischen Bedeutung der Mutterschaftssymbolik bei Hildegard von Bingen," *Tiefe des Gotteswissens — Schönheit der Sprachgestalt bei Hildegard von Bingen. Internationales Symposium in der Katholischen Akademie Rabanus Maurus Wiesbaden-Naurod vom 9. bis 12. September 1994*, ed. Margot Schmidt. Mystik in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Texte und Untersuchungen. Abt. I: Christliche Mystik, 10 (Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995), 99–116.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997), 56, 117; id., *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998) 121–27, 143, 146, et passim.

absoluteness of the Godhead. As Heinrich Schipperges states concisely: "Aus seiner kosmischen Verbundenheit erst läßt sich das Wesen des Menschen erklären. Und wie Gottes Sohn mitten im Herzen des Vaters wohnt, so hat auch der Mensch seine exemplarische Stellung in der Welt (LDO IX, 9)" (Man's nature can only be explained through its cosmic connectedness. As much as God's son lives in the father's heart, likewise man enjoys his exemplary position within the world).⁶⁰

Undoubtedly, Hildegard's discussion of her visions also demonstrates how much she was intimately familiar with the Biblical account and closely modeled the outline of her personal revelations according to the images provided by this highest scriptural authority. But she also transformed them according to her own visual observations and experiences and established fundamental links between her stage of mystical enrapture and her external life as a teacher, which probably finds its best expression, apart from her *Scivias*, in her monumental *De Operatione Dei*.⁶¹ It does not come as a surprise, however, that Hildegard repeatedly formulated her frustration with her students and the general laity as she found the contrast between her own revelations and people's responses lame, uninspiring, and incomprehensive: "O homo, est modo conueniens et congruum, ut homor rationalis sine intellectu sit ut irrationale pecus, quod non aliter facit nisi secundum quod expetit libitus ipsius? O miseri homines, qui nolunt scire magnam gloriam illam quam Deus ipsis dedit ad similitudinem sui!" (491; "O human! Is it proper and fitting that a rational person should be mindless like an irrational beast, which does nothing but what it wants? O wretched people, who refuse to know the great glory that God gave them when He made them in His likeness!" (*Scivias*, 433).⁶² Even though Hildegard related over and over again what she had heard the Godhead say to her—"A desiderantibus caelestia fideliter credendum et non pertinaciter examinandum est quomodo Filius Dei missus in mundum a Patre natus sit ex Virgine" (492; "Those who desire heavenly things must faithfully believe, but not wrongfully examine, the Son of God's being sent into the world by the Father and born of the Virgin;" 433)—the bridge between herself and the Divine was a very narrow one difficult to follow for most of her audience. She appealed to her listeners to be strong in faith and to do good works because she was fully aware that the 'Otherness' of the Godhead made it extremely difficult even for believers to gain any concrete understanding: "*per fidem* intueri et interioribus diuino cultu laborantibus fide et opere cognosci, et exterioribus otio uacantibus fama et uoce manifestari" (493; "It can be understood in faith and works by those who labor in the divine cult, that is, inside the building; and those

⁶⁰ Heinrich Schipperges, *Hildegard von Bingen*. Beck'sche Reihe Wissen, 2008 (Munich: Beck, 1995), 44.

⁶¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings*, transl. with an Introd. and Notes by Mark Atherton (London: Penguin, 2001), 171–76.

⁶² Hildegard, *Scivias*. Pars III. Corpvs Christianorvm. Continuatio Mediaeualis, XLIII, ed. Adelgundis Führkötter and Angela Carlevaris (Turnholt: Brepols, 1978), 491.

who stand idle outside can know it by words and sounds;" 434). Nevertheless, she as a mystic remained hopeful and optimistic that her listeners would take her advice to heart and follow her on her way toward the Godhead in full awareness that human knowledge would be futile in this matter, as the mystical realization of the Godhead also implied its ineffability and incomprehensibility at least for the uninspired, no-nmystical mind: "Vbi tamen fundamentum positum est, quoniam in praescientia Dei sunt et quia etiam fides saluationis eorum, quam habituri sunt, iam posita fortiter consistit" (494; "But the foundation has been laid, which is to say that they are in God's foreknowledge, and the faith that will save them is already strongly established;" 434).

VIII. Hildegard as Philosopher?

Most impressive, Hildegard was not only the leading mystic of her time, but she also can be credited with an enormous philosophical contribution, though she never staked a claim in the academic field of philosophy, being an abbess and preacher first and above all. Through her mystical visions which she freely shared with her contemporaries she also opened fundamental perspectives toward the absolute and final alterity of human existence. In all her revelations, quite parallel to many other mystical writers, she demonstrated that human life was just one aspect of existence, and that the familiar world of material objects was always surrounded or superseded by a world of spirituality. Hildegard's perspectives toward 'the Other' was a very different one than people's general attitudes toward monster lore, heathens, Jews, spirits, and ghosts, but it addressed the same epistemological question and provided a much more fundamental answer.⁶³

Her experience with, observation of, and even participation in the Divine represented a major step forward in the xenology of her time, as she demonstrated, through her own state of grace, the openness toward 'the Other' and the interconnectedness between it and human existence.

Hildegard was certainly not imbued with a modern sense of tolerance and did not express any interest in building bridges between Christians and Moslems, for instance, and she vehemently lashed out against homosexuals.⁶⁴ In her *Scivias*, for instance, she sharply criticized all non-faithful: "hoc est quod inter fortitudinem potestatis omnipotentis Dei et inter electum opus bonitatis ipsius plurimi homines sunt qui ueram fidem abnegantes magis temporalia quam aeterna sectantur, ut

⁶³ See, for instance, Aline G. Hornaday, "Visitors from another Space: The Medieval Revenant as Foreigner," *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*, 71–95.

⁶⁴ Angela Carlevaris, "Sie kamen zu ihr, um sie zu befragen. Hildegard und die Juden," *Hildegard von Bingen in ihrem historischen Umfeld*, 117–28; Fiona Maddocks, *Hildegard of Bingen*, 116.

sunt pagani, Iudaei ac falsi Christiani, semper de malo in malum descendentes" (570; "between the strong power of Almighty God and the chosen works of His goodness there stand people who deny the true faith and follow the temporal instead of the eternal. Such are pagans, Jews and false Christians; they descend from evil to evil;" 488). But by way of her mystical visions she opened dramatically significant windows toward the Godhead in its absolute 'Otherness,' thereby establishing hermeneutical avenues for a spiritual approach toward alterity in its ultimate form which promises, according to Hildegard's and many other mystics' spiritual revelations, the transgression of the physical and mental limits imposed upon human beings. The mystical vision, however, demonstrates that the barrier between a believer and the Godhead can be torn down, as the world of 'Otherness' actively approaches the mystic and invites him or her to participate in the glories of the Divine.⁶⁵ As Theodoric comments in Hildegard's *Vita*, relying on a rhetorical question: "For what is found deeper than a pure heart, what more sublime than that the incomprehensible should be comprehended?"⁶⁶ Hildegard herself indicated that she had a full understanding of the illuminating effect of her revelations on human epistemology when she referred to the impact of religious song and poetry on the mind: "Sic et uerbum corpus designat, symphonia uero spiritum manifestat: quoniam et caelestis harmonia diuinitatem denuntiat et uerbum humanitatem Filii Dei propalat" (631; "And so the words symbolize the body, and the jubilant music indicates the spirit; and the celestial harmony shows the Divinity, and the words the Humanity of the Son of God;" 533).

Ultimately, 'the Otherness' of the Godhead in her visions promised to transform itself into an intimate part of the mystic, and the divine alterity suddenly emerges as a key element for hermeneutics to catapult the human creature out of its physical and blinding imprisonment of the earthen existence into the illuminated universe of divine harmony and absolute integration of all creatures—almost a postmodern realization of the essence of true theology, the "breakthrough of otherness, of humanity's vulnerability and awe before the incandescence of the *numinousum*."⁶⁷

As Frank Schalow now points out with regard to Martin Heidegger's existentialist philosophy—which bears an uncanny similarity with medieval mystical thought—"human beings can receive the mystery only insofar as their way of speaking is coordinated with the modalities of the holy's appearance and withdrawal, i.e., its preference for reticence. From a theological standpoint, God's

⁶⁵ Viki Ranff, *Wissen und Weisheit*, 276–94.

⁶⁶ Quoted from: Anna Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard*, 151.

⁶⁷ Frank Schalow, *Heidegger and the Quest for the Sacred. From Thought to the Sanctuary of Faith. Contributions to Phenomenology*, 44 (Dordrecht, Boston, and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 90; the term "postmodern theology" is also borrowed from Schalow, ix.

voice can be heard and human beings can enter into an appropriate relationship with it only via this grounding-attunement, the preparation which dwells in silence."⁶⁸ If we consider Hildegard's most profound description of the universe relying on the paradigm of macrocosm and microcosm, framed by absolute alterity and selfhood, it seems very likely that she would have fully agreed with Heidegger's philosophical ruminations. From our perspective, however, we can also add that she obviously staked her own space within her world and powerfully appropriated the mystical and philosophical discourse as a medium of her self-realization through the Godhead. Hildegard was, of course, no medieval feminist, and could certainly not be compared with Christine de Pizan (ca. 1364–1430) as an outspoken defender of women's rights and social roles. However, she demonstrated through her visionary accounts, which she obviously dictated in Latin, the extent to which a woman could assume authority even within this highly patriarchal domain of the medieval Church. Hildegard's voice reverberates loud and clear throughout the centuries, like that of many other female mystics whose visionary accounts exerted a profound appeal for generations to come.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Frank Schalow, *Heidegger*, 135; see also Richard Schaeffler, *Frömmigkeit des Denkens?: Martin Heidegger und die katholische Theologie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978), 16–22.

⁶⁹ See Sarah S. Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 186, reaches the significant observation regarding the fate of Mechthild's mystical account: "the gradual disappearance of Mechthild of Magdeburg and her *Lux divinitatis* occurs for a number of reasons, but not because Mechthild was excluded from a tradition because of her gender. Rather, Mechthild's authorship presents a problem for the initial publishers of the Latin version of her book that is resolved through the imagining of different legitimizing (sic) female traditions"

Chapter Five

The Winsbeckin – Female Discourse or Male Projection? New Questions to a Middle High German Gendered Didactic Text in Comparison with Christine de Pizan. What do we make out of a female voice within a male dominated textual genre?

I. Women's Voices in the Middle Ages

In light of our foregone discussion, let me rephrase the basic questions that determine this study overall. Did women have a voice in medieval German literature, and did they determine their own lives within certain parameters, or were they nothing more than decorative icons in a men's world simply serving a biological function? Were they nothing but chattel, just meaningless objects of admiration (the courtly lady of *fin amors*, or of *Minnesang*), whereas all real decisions, actions, and operations were carried out by men? Had the misogynists and patriarchs from Jerome to Matheolus indeed won the battle? If there ever was such a battle, would it not require at least two fronts in this gender discourse? Fortunately, considering the large corpus of modern research dealing with this and similar questions, it would be almost antiquated even to assume that the latter scenario—the absolute rule of patriarchy at the cost of silencing women—was the case.¹ Many mystical writers such as Hildegard von Bingen, Elisabeth von

¹ Informed by theories such as marxism and feminism, some scholars such as Jerold C. Frakes, *Brides and Doom. Gender, Property, and Power in Medieval German Women's Epic*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), continue to argue along those lines. More recent attempts to utilize the concepts developed by Judith Butler have raised our awareness about gender issues and, as some say, the constructiveness of sexual identity, but they have also led us

Schönau, Mechthild von Magdeburg, Gertrud the Great, and Mechthild von Hackeborn, whether they resorted to Latin, to Middle High German, or Middle Low German when they recorded their visions, powerfully teach us that modern concepts of medieval literacy have been examined far too long from an exclusively male perspective.²

Fortunately, we have also moved far beyond a rather naive binary opposition of early feminism and have realized the discursive nature of all gender issues, which now also applies to the critical examination of mystical literature. As Thelma Fenster and Clare A. Lees underscore in the introduction to their volume *Gender in Debate*, “arguments [regarding the gender issue], whether defamatory or defensive, were remarkably fluid and adaptable, lending themselves to a range of courtly, learned or semi-learned, didactic, and moralizing discourses . . .”³ And Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski confirm this observation in the introduction to their volume, *Gendering the Master Narrative* (2003), “Whatever stance scholars adopt in analyzing changes in women’s power and influence, however, the current trend—itself an outgrowth of post-structural inquiry—is to criticize the prevailing master narrative for its excessive reliance on political and institutional themes, its adherence to periodization that privileges clearly demarcated transformations in public authority, and its inattention to gender as a category of analysis.”⁴

Religious women such as the tenth-century Benedictine nun Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, the anchorite Frau Ava (died in 1127), and the highly learned Abbess Herrad von Hohenburg (died in 1195) demonstrated that convent women

astray in the assessment of women’s true role within medieval society, see *Manlichiu Wip, wiplich man. Zur Konstruktion der Kategorien ‘Körper’ und ‘Geschlecht’ in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Ed. Ingrid Bennewitz and Helmut Tervooren. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie, 9 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1999); see now also *Genderdiskurse und Körperbilder im Mittelalter: Eine Bilanzierung nach Butler und Laqueur*, ed. Ingrid Bennewitz and Ingrid Kasten. Bamberger Studien zum Mittelalter, 1 (Münster, Hamburg, and London: LIT, 2002).

² See, for example, Kurt Ruh’s magisterial *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*. Vol. 2: *Frauenmystik und Franziskanische Mystik der Frühzeit* (Munich: Beck, 1993); Susanne Bürkle, *Literatur im Kloster: historische Funktion und rhetorische Legitimation frauenmystischer Texte des 14. Jahrhunderts*. Bibliotheca Germanica, 38 (Tübingen: Francke, 1999); *Frauen in der deutschen Literaturgeschichte. Die ersten 800 Jahre. Ein Lesebuch*. Ausgewählt, übersetzt und kommentiert von Albrecht Classen. Women in German Literature, 4 (New York, Washington, DC, et al.: Peter Lang, 2000).

³ Thelma Fenster and Clair A. Lees, “Introduction,” *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. eadem. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), 5. See also the introduction to *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 278 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004).

⁴ Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, “Introduction,” *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. eadem (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 9.

were at the forefront of the intellectual life of their time, writing religious drama, prayers, biblical paraphrases, and encyclopedic texts. Similarly, numerous Beguine women often enjoyed the highest respect within their communities because of their religious authority, in explicit contrast to the authority wielded by the Church.⁵ Many other names could be mentioned here, taking us through the long period from the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries, who would confirm the considerable public role played and influence exerted by medieval women.⁶ But numerous questions remain and challenge us to probe the issue further, as women do not seem to have figured prominently at all within courtly, that is, secular literature, although the evidence to the contrary is mounting. We can now safely corroborate that many different women carved a niche on their own—see the examples of mystical literature discussed above—and succeeded in leading a life more or less on their own as writers, artists, composers, and even craftspeople.⁷

In her insightful study *Mothers and Daughters in Medieval German Literature*, Ann Marie Rasmussen discusses the curious phenomenon of intra-generational teachings and also inserts a chapter on a most fascinating thirteenth-century dialogue poem in which an older and experienced woman called Die Winsbeckin explores, together with her daughter, the issues of love, honor, and public reputation, as they concern women within a courtly society. Rasmussen does not, however, seriously consider the possibility that this poem might have been composed by a woman. Instead she only analyzes the narrative voices and examines the satirical and critical nature of the daughter's statements who is at first so adamantly opposed to her mother's teachings regarding love, men, and marriage, at the end, however, she accepts her mother's advices regarding a woman's role within her society.⁸

⁵ Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, transl. Myra Heerspink-Scholz. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); see my review, forthcoming in *Mediaevistik*.

⁶ *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*. Vol. 1: *Vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler (Munich: Beck, 1988); *Frauen, Literatur, Geschichte: schreibende Frauen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Hiltrud Gnüg and Renate Möhrmann. 2nd, completely rev. ed. (1985; Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998). The claim of having revised the medieval section cannot be confirmed, however. One of the best critical studies on medieval women writers proves to be Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of her Sex. Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts*. Women of Letters (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997).

⁷ Counter-arguments from the French side are now offered in *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, ed., transl., and introd. Eglal Doss-Quinby, Joan Tasker Grimbirt, Wendy Pfeffer, Elizabeth Aubrey (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁸ Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters in Medieval German Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 136–59; see my review in *German Quarterly* 71, 4 (1998): 393–94.

II. Winsbeckin

Although such an exchange between mother and daughter does not figure often in medieval German literature, except in Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneit* (ca. 1170), in the *Nibelungenlied* (ca. 1200), and in some of Neidhart's satirical summer songs (ca. 1220–1240)—all of them discussed by Rasmussen in extensive detail—the text allegedly composed by Die Winsbeckin has never been considered as a potentially major contribution to medieval German women's literature, and so has also escaped the notice of feminist and gender scholars in other medieval languages. In the manuscript, the mother's discussion with her daughter follows an analogous discourse between father and son, composed by Der Winsbecke. The suffix 'in' in the mother's name indicates the Winsbeckin's female gender. Both texts have survived, often together, in a handful of manuscripts, both in complete form and as fragments, and were first published by Moriz Haupt in 1845, edited in a historical-critical edition by Albert Leitzmann in 1888, revised in a second edition in 1928, and finally completely revised by Ingo Reiffenstein in 1962.⁹ Since then, these two dialogue poems have not attracted much interest, as reflected by Ursula Schulze's summary entry in the *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (1998)¹⁰ and by Frieder Schanze's survey report and brief interpretation in the *Verfasserlexikon* (1998).¹¹

Alfred Mundhenk offered a basic interpretation of our text for the general reader, limiting himself, however, to the father's teachings;¹² Richard Allen Anderson published an English translation;¹³ Wernfried Hofmeister investigated

⁹ *Winsbeckische Gedichte nebst Tirol und Fridebrant*, ed. Albert Leitzmann. Third, newly revised ed. Ingo Reiffenstein. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 9 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1962).

¹⁰ Ursula Schulze, "Winsbecke, Winsbeckin," *Lexikon des Mittelalters*. Vol. 9, 2 (Munich: LexMA, 1998), 240–41; Johann Friedrich Frischeisen's anthology *Winsbeke. Der Windsbacher Beitrag zum Minnesang des Hochmittelalters*. Theorie und Forschung, 271; Literaturwissenschaft, 21 (Regensburg: Roderer, 1994), though not entirely devoid of valuable observations, largely reflects the methodological approach typical of the nineteenth (!) century and has no place in modern German scholarship, see Jens Haustein's review in *Germanistik* 37 (1996): 151–52.

¹¹ Frieder Schanze, "'Winsbecke', 'Winsbeckin' und 'Winsbecken-Parodie,'" *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*. 2nd, completely revised edition by Burghart Wachinger et al. Vol. 10, 3/4 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1998), 1224–31.

¹² Alfred Mundhenk, "Der Winsbecke oder Die Erziehung des Ritters," *Interpretationen mittelhochdeutscher Lyrik*, ed. Günther Jungbluth (Bad Homburg v. d. H.: Gehlen, 1969), 269–86; Winfried Frey, "die rede ich in din herze grabe. Zur Vermittlung von Herrenethik im 'Winsbecke,'" *Philologische Untersuchungen gewidmet Elfriede Stutz zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Alfred Ebenbauer. *Philologica Germanica*, 7 (Vienna: Braumüller, 1984), 176–95, offers more of a social-critical reading, but likewise ignores the part of the mother-daughter dialogue.

¹³ Richard Allen Anderson, *Der Winsbecke: Translation and Commentary*, here quoted from: *Dissertation Abstracts International* 42, 5 (1981): 2148A. For a modern German translation with a brief introduction, see Albrecht Classen, *Frauen in der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, (2000), 71–91.

a provocative parody poem that is attached to the portion of the Winsbeckin text, written sometime in the late thirteenth or perhaps fourteenth century,¹⁴ whereas Ann Marie Rasmussen recently observed that the two texts have to be seen as interactive parts, demonstrating the various communicative strategies in the teaching of basic conduct rules in an aristocratic household: "The transmission of *Die Winsbeckin* and *Der Winsbecke* as a textual dyad in the earliest manuscripts suggests the manuscripts set these two genre-based horizons of conduct literature, monovocal advice literature and debate literature, in productive debate with one another."¹⁵ Most recently Juanita Feros Ruys has briefly outlined the European context of this debate poem, referring, for instance, to the English *How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter* or *The Good Wyfe Wold a Pylgremage*, Petrus Alfonsi's Latin *Disciplina Clericalis*, and the French translation *Le chastoiment d'un père à son fils*, and then focused on the parent-child relationship particularly in the Middle High German text.¹⁶

All four persons involved in both the *Winsbecke* and *Winsbeckin* are depicted in an idealizing fashion in the famous *Manessische Liederhandschrift*, or *Große Heidelberger Liederhandschrift*, Ms A, created sometime in the early fourteenth century and today housed in the University Library of Heidelberg (cpg 848, 213r and 217).¹⁷ The images of father and son, and mother and daughter, who are portrayed in this manuscript, are designed according to standard models of medieval aesthetics and do not carry any biographical information, which also applies to the almost ever present coats of arms insofar as these are, most probably, fictional in nature as well. The mother, for example, looks exactly like the lady in the miniature of the Court Steward of Singenberg (no. 48) who honors the poet with a wreath, or the lady standing in the background of the miniature of Heinrich of Morungen (no. 34). Similarly, the daughter's image closely resembles the model of the lady in the miniature of Margrave Otto of Brandenburg (no. 6), or the lady in the miniature of Bernger of Horheim (no. 55).

Significantly, however, the illustrator assumed, obviously untroubled by any doubt, that the Winsbeckin and her daughter indeed had carried out this discussion, as he provides a separate page illustrating both women talking to each

¹⁴ Wernfried Hofmeister, "Literarische Provokation im Mittelalter am Beispiel der 'Winsbecke-Parodie,'" *Sprachkunst* 22, 1 (1991): 1–24.

¹⁵ Ann Marie Rasmussen, "Fathers to Think Back Through. The Middle High German Mother-Daughter and Father-Son Advice Poems Known as *Die Winsbeckin* and *Der Winsbecke*," *Medieval Conduct*, ed. Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark. Medieval Cultures, 29 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 106–34, here 127.

¹⁶ Juanita Feros Ruys, "Peter Abelard's *Carmen ad Astralabium*," *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: The Results of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2005), 203–27; here 209–14.

¹⁷ *Codex Manesse. Die Miniaturen der Großen Heidelberger Liederhandschrift*, ed. and explained by Ingo F. Walther, together with Gisela Siebert. 4th ed. (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1989), 145 and 147.

other. As in all other cases, we find the name of the “poet” written down on the top of the painting: “Diu winsbekin.” On the other hand, the *Manesse* manuscript, created in the early fourteenth century, does not necessarily serve as a reliable source concerning the social rank, or individuality, of the poets represented therein. Nevertheless, the remarkable fact of having one miniature only, among several hundreds, showing two women debating with each other must not be overlooked. All other full-page miniatures serve to portray one poet, whether in an idealized or fanciful form or not. If we assume that the Winsbecke was a historically verifiable poet, then why should we not assume the same of the Winsbeckin?

Medieval German scholarship has never even considered the possibility of female authorship in this case, blithely assuming that all medieval didactic texts, including those where a woman speaks up, were composed by men because of traditional power structures. But already the earliest medieval didactic treatise, though in Latin, was written by a woman (!), Dhuoda in the eighth century. Hence, the surprisingly contemptuous and superficial treatment of this dialogue poem does not bode well for the evidence brought forth to support the hitherto unquestioned claim that a male poet created this female debate poem. G. G. Gervinus, who sings such a song of praise of *Der Winsbecke*, describing it as one of the most valuable pieces of medieval German literature,¹⁸ entirely ignores *Die Winsbeckin*. Gustav Ehrismann simply states that another male poet had become familiar with the *Winsbecke* poem and imitated it to provide the complimentary perspective of what a mother would teach her daughter. He lacked, however, as Ehrismann continues, some of the rhetorical skills of the first poet and tended to repeat him(!)self.¹⁹ J. G. Robertson argues along the same line and does not even raise the question who the author might have been.²⁰ Helmut de Boor (1967) suggests the very opposite and is inclined to accept that both *Der Winsbecke* and *Die Winsbeckin* were composed by a real father and a real mother, each addressing their respective child. As to *Der Winsbecke* he argues: “Doch klingt uns diese Rede so persönlich durchwärmt, daß wir an mehr als eine literarische Fiktion denken

¹⁸ G. G. Gervinus, *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung*. Vol. 1 (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1853), 426: “Es ist dies einer der theuersten Reste unserer ritterlichen Poesie, weil die Lebensregeln, die darin aufgestellt sind, nicht nur dem Schönsten zur Seite gesetzt werden dürfen, was über Sittlichkeit und würdiges Leben gesagt ist, sondern auch dem Allgemeingültigsten” (It is one of the most valuable remainders of our chivalric poetry because the teachings about life, which are spelled out in it, can be placed not only directly next to the most beautiful, what has ever been said about morality and a dignified life, but also next to the eternal values).

¹⁹ Gustav Ehrismann, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters*. Zweiter Teil: *Die mittelhochdeutsche Literatur*. Schlussband. Handbuch des deutschen Unterrichts an höheren Schulen, 6/2 (Munich: Beck, 1935), 314.

²⁰ J. G. Robertson, *A History of German Literature*. 6th ed. Dorothy Reich (1902; Elmsford, NY: London House & Maxwell, 1970), 117.

möchten" (this speech sounds so personal that we can imagine that it was more than just a literary fiction).²¹ Regarding *Die Winsbeckin*, de Boor states: "Dies echte Wechselgespräch von Mutter und Tochter ist aus demselben höfischen Denken hervorgegangen wie das alte Winsbeckengedicht, doch schwerlich das Werk desselben Mannes" (This authentic dialogue between mother and daughter resulted from the same courtly thinking as the old poem by the Winsbecke, but it is probably not the work of the same man).²²

More recent literary historians, such as Max Wehrli, have demonstrated an astonishing degree of disrespect and ignorance of the mother-daughter exchange once again. Wehrli refers to the Winsbeckin poet only in a half sentence without giving her any credit, not even commenting on the phenomenon that the text is explicitly gendered.²³ Not surprisingly, we read in Ingo F. Walther's commentary to the illustrations in the *Manessische Handschrift*, "it would be a waste of time to search for a female author of this name [Winsbeckin]."²⁴ Bernhard Sowinski only mentions in passing that the poem *Winsbecke* is also accompanied by a poem under the title *Winsbeckin* in which mother and daughter talk to each other. Whereas he lists, at least in some detail, what the major points of the Winsbecke's teaching for his son are, he refrains from giving us any information regarding the other poem.²⁵ Remarkably, the opposite was the case during earlier centuries, beginning with Melchior Goldast's edition in 1604 and concluding with Johann Christoph Adelung's enthusiastic characterization in his *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch* of 1796.²⁶

Ann Marie Rasmussen, however, so far the lone voice, has at least raised the question: "why could a woman not have authored the female-voiced verses, *Die Winsbeckin*? Why does the paradigm of a coherent and 'reasonable' [verständiger] author / narrator apply to *The Old Poem* but not to *Die Winsbeckin*?"²⁷ Unfortunately, she does not offer an answer to this particular question, instead she

²¹ Helmut de Boor, *Die deutsche Literatur im späten Mittelalter. Vorbereitung, Blüte Ausklang, 1170–1250. Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, 2 (Munich: Beck, 1967), 408.

²² de Boor, *Die deutsche Literatur*, 409.

²³ Max Wehrli, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im Mittelalter. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts*. 3rd ed. bibliographically expanded (1980; Stuttgart: Reclam, 1997), 456; similarly disappointing prove to be Marion E. Gibbs and Sidney M. Johnson, *Medieval German Literature. A Companion* (New York and London: Garland, 1997), 425.

²⁴ Ingo F. Walther, *Codex Manesse*, 146: "Es ist daher müßig, etwa nach einem weiblichen Verfasser dieses Namens zu suchen."

²⁵ Bernhard Sowinski, *Lehrhafte Dichtung des Mittelalters*. Realien zur Literatur, Abt. D: Literaturgeschichte. Sammlung Metzler, 103 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1971), 81.

²⁶ Wolfgang Harms, "Des Winsbeckes Genius: Zur Einschätzung didaktischer Poesie des deutschen Mittelalters im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert," *Mittelalter-Rezeption: Ein Symposium*, ed. Peter Wapnewski. Germanistische Symposien Berichtsbände, 6 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986), 46–59.

²⁷ Rasmussen, "Fathers to Think Back Through," 119.

points us into another direction. She suggests that the female dialogue was, as practically all scholars since the early nineteenth century have assumed,²⁸ a fictional projection, and then she asks: "why could the same not be true of *Der Winsbecke*?"²⁹ With the stroke of the proverbial pen she rejects even the faint possibility because for her both dialogue poems appear as purely narrative creations without any particular female gender markers. The East German scholar Wolfgang Heinemann at least offers a close reading of the text, summarizing its high points, and credits the text for its lively and interesting treatment of a highly traditional topic.³⁰

Obviously, most aspects of this intriguing dialogue text need to be reexamined, especially as the almost complete disregard by current scholarship has left the fictional arguments exchanged between mother and daughter almost in the dark. Surprisingly, most recent German scholarship on medieval didactic literature has entirely ignored both the father-son and the mother-daughter dialogue poems.³¹ Rasmussen approaches the poem with a specific premise derived from a rather radical feminist perspective which implies that even when women voice their opinion in medieval texts, the patriarchal system was so strong that in that case we must assume a man as the secret author hiding behind the mask of the female name. She concludes her analysis with the following argument: "*Die Winsbeckin* assumes that women must be taught how to inhabit the socio-sexual function that is expected of them. With her instructions, the mother is initiating her daughter into the honorable behavior that is expected of her as a noblewoman."³²

²⁸ Harms, "Des Winsbeckes Genius," 52.

²⁹ Rasmussen, "Fathers to Think Back Through," 120.

³⁰ Wolfgang Heinemann, "Poesie und Didaxe," *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur. Mitte des 12. bis Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Rolf Bräuer. Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, 2 (Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1990), 645–80; here 669–70.

³¹ See the various contributions to *Zivilisationsprozesse: Zu Erziehungsschriften in der Vormoderne*, ed. Rüdiger Schnell (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2004). The authors primarily reexamine the paradigm concerning the civilizing process as developed by Norbert Elias (1939) in light of medieval and early-modern didactic treatises.

³² Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters*, 158. She relies heavily on Trude Ehlert's study "Die Frau als Arznei: Zum Bild der Frau in hochmittelalterlicher deutscher Lehrdichtung," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 105 (1986): 42–62, who suggests that the two-part structure of both texts implies a clear gender demarcation and openly leads to the reconfirmation of patriarchal society. In particular, Ehlert argues, 62: "Die Chance einer Selbstdefinition der Frau, die mit der Fiktion der weiblichen Perspektive in der *Winsbeckin* gegeben scheint, wird also nicht genutzt—und kann wohl auch gar nicht genutzt werden, weil mit einem sich aus dem männlichen Diskurs, aus der männlichen Seh- und Darstellungsweise ausgliedernden Selbst-Bewußtsein, dem Bewußtsein einer Eigenwertigkeit der Frau zu dieser Zeit noch nicht zu rechnen ist." (The chance for a self-definition of the woman, as it seems to be given through the fictionalized female perspective in the *Winsbeckin*, has not been utilized—and probably cannot be utilized because we cannot yet expect to find a female consciousness that is different from the male perspective and male projection as it existed at that time).

III. Was there a Female Writer Called Winsbeckin?

In light of a rather disconcerting situation regarding this highly unusual dialogue poem involving two women, we need to return to the drawing board, so to speak, and begin with a close textual analysis to lay the foundation for a more critical, especially less stereotypical reading; next, we need to reexamine the manuscript tradition, and third, we also should study *Die Winsbeckin* in the context of other medieval women's literature, even if we do not find any similar didactic texts in medieval and early-modern German and European literature. However, there are at least two exceptions, the first and most important being Christine de Pizan's *Treasure of the City of Ladies* (1405). If we briefly turn to the age of the Reformation, we also come across Conrad Porta's *Jungfrauenspiegel*, printed in 1580, which reflects the same didactic, ethical, and moral ideals and values as those formulated by the mother in the *Winsbeckin* poem, but it is clearly determined by a male and strongly religious perspective.³³ Nevertheless, Porta's treatise demonstrates the longevity of the genre of conduct books for women both in the courtly tradition and in early modern Reformation literature.

Here I will limit myself primarily to the first task and examine, for example, the validity of Hans-Joachim Behr's noteworthy but so far unsupported claim that the *Winsbeckin* poem represents a productive continuation of the *Winsbecke* poem (by a female poet?) through its focus on courtly love.³⁴

Contrary to many statements in diverse handbooks and lexica,³⁵ the parallels between *Der Winsbecke* and *Die Winsbeckin* are not as close, as one might assume. The father basically gives his son concrete instructions of proper knightly behavior, similar to Gurnemanz who teaches young Parzival the basic concepts of

³³ Conrad Porta, *Jungfrauenspiegel*. Faksimiledruck der Ausgabe von 1580. Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Cornelia Niekus Moore. Nachdruck deutscher Literatur des 17. Jahrhunderts, 76 (Bern, Frankfurt a. M., et al.: Peter Lang, 1990). For critical editions of the previous texts, see below.

³⁴ Hans-Joachim Behr, "Der 'Werden Lop' und 'Gotes Huld'. Überlegungen zur konzeptionellen Einheit des 'Winsbecke'," *Leuvense Bijdragen* 74 (1985): 377–94; here 390–91: "Das im 'Winsbecke' zugrundegelegte Aufbauschema erwies sich als fruchtbar: noch im 13. Jahrhundert wird es in der 'Winsbeckin' verwendet, um den unterrepräsentierten Aspekt 'Minne' ebenfalls in direkte Handlungsanweisungen umzusetzen" (The constructive schema upon which 'Winsbecke' is based proved to be fertile; already in the thirteenth century it is used in the 'Winsbeckin' in order to translate the underrepresented aspect 'courtly love' also into direct instructions of behavior [action]).

³⁵ Indicative of the whole dilemma that we are facing, *Medieval Germany. An Encyclopedia*, ed. John M. Jeep (New York and London: Garland, 2001), does not even include a lemma for *Winsbecke* or the *Winsbeckin*. The same applies to *An Encyclopedia of Continental Women Writers*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson. 2 vols (New York and London: Garland, 1991).

knighthood in Wolfram von Eschenbach's famous romance *Parzival* (ca. 1205).³⁶ These are followed by religious teachings, when the mother in *Die Winsbeckin* finally enters a much more personal, almost intimate dialogue with her daughter who resolutely responds to her statements and deftly makes her own voice heard, at times rejecting her mother's opinion, at other times requesting further information. By contrast, in *Der Winsbecke*, after a total of fifty-six stanzas in which the father speaks all by himself, the son finally responds, but he only comments on the overall situation of the world and its vanity, encouraging his father to build a hospital/retirement community on his lands and to withdraw there for his old days, which the father fully approves of as the proper spiritual consequence from his own teachings.³⁷

By contrast, mother and daughter in *Die Winsbeckin* assume entirely different positions which deserve to be analyzed closely with respect to female role patterns, two the two speakers' self-consciousness, and to possible models of identification for the noble lady. Would it really be adequate to characterize the fundamental purpose of this dialogue, as Ursula Schulze suggests, to teach young girls living within courtly society "gezügelter Verhalten gegenüber männlichen sexuellen Begehrens und Verführung" (controlled behavior opposed to male sexual desire and seduction)?³⁸ Would it be true that all medieval didactic literature addressing women approaches them as passive objects of male control mechanisms? Why could we not imagine that medieval women embraced and pursued the idea of active involvement in erotic relationships? Many of the *troubairitz* poems (twelfth century) suggest this position in unmistakable terms, and it seems that the mother in this German didactic narrative also subscribes to the idea of women's active role.

The didactic poet immediately emphasizes two important aspects. The mother is identified as an honorable woman who knows how to speak in courtly, well-educated terms ("Ein wîplich wîp in zûhten sprach").³⁹ Secondly, she appears to

³⁶ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*. Studienausgabe. Mittelhochdeutscher Text nach der sechsten Ausgabe von Karl Lachmann. Übersetzung von Peter Knecht. Einführung zum Text von Bernd Schirok (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1998), Book III, 161, 23ff.

³⁷ Bruno Boesch, *Lehrhafte Literatur. Lehre in der Dichtung und Lehrdichtung im deutschen Mittelalter*. Grundlagen der Germanistik, 21 (Berlin: Schmidt, 1977), correctly states that only *Die Winsbeckin* reflects a real dialogue, 108, though then he laments that the narrative exchange does not offer anything new in thematic terms. See also the broad survey by Bernhard Sowinski, *Lehrhafte Dichtung des Mittelalters*. Sammlung Metzler. Realien zur Literatur. Abt. D: Literaturgeschichte, 6 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1971), 81.

³⁸ Schulz, "Winsbecke, Winsbeckin," 1998, 240.

³⁹ Walther von der Vogelweide refers to the very opposite model, criticizing the gender reversal which he observes at the court. Instead of "wîplich wîp" (feminine women) he observes "manlîchiu wîp" (manly women) and "wîpliche man" (female men) (L 80, 20). Walther von der Vogelweide, *Leich, Lieder, Sangsprüche*, 14th, completely newly revised ed. of the ed. by Karl Lachmann, with

take good care of her daughter whom she greets in very warm, almost emotional terms, praising the day when her child was born, and giving thanks to God for her daughter's beautiful face. As James A. Schultz has observed, however, she does not address her daughter as a child, instead she offers her already advice how to enter the world of adulthood and how to perform well according to adult principles, embracing the erotic as the basis of all gender relationships.⁴⁰

Her daughter responds in kind, addressing her mother in a respectful, even if formulaic, terms ("liebiu muoter," 2, 1; dear mother), promising her that she will accept God as the Lord of the world according to the older woman's teaching. Repeating the Fourth Commandment, the daughter openly declares that she wants to be a role model for other girls in respecting her mother. Die Winsbeckin responds likewise, thanking her daughter for her obedience (3, 1–3). Moreover, she is fully aware that a good mother helps her daughter grow up by giving her good advice, preventing any damage to her daughter's public reputation, or honor ("ob dîn lop wîplîch unde ganz / von dînen schulden würde hol." 3, 6–7). The mother realizes, in other words, that good teaching prepares young women for their public role in society, which obviously implies growing into the expected gender role.⁴¹ Her daughter acknowledges that women can easily fall into ill repute once people start talking about them and their private lives (4, 9–10), but she also emphasizes that young people want to enjoy their freedom and happiness (4, 5). Her mother does not intend to criticize her for this attitude, and rather underscores the necessity for her daughter to experience "hôchgemuot" (5, 1; high spirits); yet she wants her to combine it with self-discipline and morality.

Public honor can only be acquired if she is able to achieve this composite ideal and also recognizes the authorities in their honorable position (5, 5–6). Women must pursue chastity and moderation and are strongly encouraged to avoid looking directly at men as this would betray their erotic desires (5, 9–10).⁴² Speaking from experience at court, the mother alerts her daughter that the public, here represented by the "melder" (7, 8; spies), would immediately discover if she were to look around freely, revealing her secret interests in entering a love affair.⁴³

contributions by Thomas Bein and Horst Brunner, ed. von Christoph Cormeau (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1996).

⁴⁰ James A. Schultz, *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages, 1100–1350*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 79, 97, 217.

⁴¹ The same issue was explicitly discussed in the *Roman de Silence*. Heldris, de Cornuaille, *Silence: a Thirteenth-century French Romance*, ed. and trans. by Sarah Roche-Mahdi. Medieval Texts and Studies, 10 (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1992).

⁴² Madeline H. Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages. Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 51–54.

⁴³ In the contemporary didactic verse novella *Meier Helmbrecht* by Wernher der Gartenære, ed. Friedrich Panzer and Kurt Ruh. 10th ed. Hans-Joachim Ziegeler. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 11 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), vv. 905–08, the father also indicates that he has had experience with

At this point the daughter fully agrees with her mother, expressing fear of potential threats against her personal integrity. If we think of the often repeated discussions of the phenomenon that one look at a male hero sufficed to make a woman fall in love with him, such as Lavinia in Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneit*, the mother's warning makes sense.⁴⁴ The subsequent stanzas reflect general teaching standards espoused by many other didactic writers from that time, such as Thomasin von Zircklaere, Hugo von Trimberg, and Robert de Blois, who almost verbatim gave very similar advices.⁴⁵

Would this, as a consequence, really imply that the *Winsbeckin* poem was written by a male writer for his female audience? When the mother refers her daughter to the example provided by the chambermaid Lunete in Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein* (11, 6–10), however, she does not reveal particularly male or female ideals. On the contrary, mother and daughter exchange their opinions in full accordance with the general social norms of their times and do not pursue characteristic female gender issues. In other words, the mother-daughter dialogue does not necessarily signal male dominance or female submissiveness.

Medieval noble ladies would not have had, just like mothers today, any interest in raising their daughters as rebellious young ladies who would have questioned the paradigm of courtly society and parental authority.⁴⁶ This is particularly true because the daughter primarily requests from her mother to provide her with instructions in honorable behavior: "und lère mich nâch êren leben, / gebâren unde sprechen eben" (12, 4–5; teach me to live according to the ideals of an honorable life, / how to behavior and how to speak). Subsequently the mother stresses that self-control and discipline in behavior ("zuht," 13, 2) offer the best mechanisms to direct the senses toward a goal and to organize the personal conditions.⁴⁷ The term *zuht*, however, represents one of the most important elements in medieval conduct literature both for male and female audiences and constituted the foundation of courtliness.⁴⁸ In this regard, *Die Winsbeckin* does not only teach her daughter how

courtly life, though he has left the court a long time ago and now inquires with his son about the courtiers' lifestyle.

⁴⁴ Heinrich von Veldeke, *Eneasroman*. Die Berliner Bilderhandschrift mit Übersetzung und Kommentar, ed. Hans Fromm. Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 4 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992), 268, 8–39; Haiko Wandhoff, *Der epische Blick. Eine mediengeschichtliche Studie zur höfischen Literatur*. Philologische Studien und Quellen, 141 (Berlin: Schmidt, 1996), 169–79.

⁴⁵ Joachim Bumke, *Die höfische Kultur. Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter*. Vol. 2 (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), 477–83.

⁴⁶ See the contributions to *Young Medieval Women*, ed. Katherine J. Lewis, Noël James Menuge, and Kim M. Phillips (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

⁴⁷ Otfrid Ehrismann, unter Mitarbeit von Albrecht Classen, Winder McConnell, et al., *Ehre und Mut. Äventiure und Minne. Höfische Wortgeschichten aus dem Mittelalter* (Munich: Beck, 1995), see "zuht und tugent. Die höfische Bildung," 248–53.

⁴⁸ C. Stephen Jaeger, "Beauty of Manners and Discipline (*schoene site, zuht*): An Imperial Tradition of

to perform as a woman within a men's world—crudely put, as a sexual object—but rather how to espouse the fundamental ethical principles of courtly society at large and to perform as an individual according to the general norms.

Disagreement, however, soon erupts as the mother considers “zuht” as the precondition for courtly love, including the sexual union of man and woman. In particular, she stresses that a woman's erotic ideals consist in being wooed by numerous knights who will waste many lances in tournaments on her behalf, a trope often used by Middle High German poets to express the degree to which a woman was admired for her beauty and erotic attractiveness.⁴⁹ But the daughter does not simply agree, instead she protests against the not-so-subtle insinuation that her physical beauty would automatically lead to the experience of sexuality, a protest that Kriemhild in the *Nibelungenlied* also had raised, though there the mother had specifically talked about marriage and encouraged her daughter to plan ahead and prepare herself for a future husband.⁵⁰

The Winsbeckin is realistic enough to accept that nobody can limit anyone's thoughts and feelings, and she knows that men always harbor sexual feelings when they are confronted with a woman (15, 9–10). Her daughter, on the other hand, agrees that the praise of honorable people represents an ideal (16, 1–2) and admonishes any potential lover to aspire for the highest virtue, otherwise he would not have any chance to win her hand (16, 9–10). This meets her mother's approval because she also knows that many men cannot be trusted because of their crude value system which would not prevent them from stealing women's honor (17, 9–10)—obviously raising the specter of possible rape, not at all unknown to medieval courtly society.⁵¹ The daughter believes, somewhat naively, that she can

Courtliness in the German Romance,” C. Stephen Jaeger, *Scholars and Courtiers: Intellectuals and Society in the Medieval West*. Variorum Collected Studies Series, CS 753 (Aldershot, Hampshire, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), XI: 27–45 (orig. 1984).

⁴⁹ See, for example, Gahmuret's reference to the many lances the young squire Schionatulander would have to use up in tournaments in order to win the necessary public honor which in turn would prepare him for Sigûne's love. Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Titarel*. Herausgegeben, übersetzt und mit einem Stellenkommentar sowie einer Einführung versehen von Helmut Brackert und Stephan Fuchs-Jolie (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2003), 107, for a commentary, see 221–22.

⁵⁰ *Das Nibelungenlied. Mittelhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch*. Nach dem Text von Karl Bartsch und Helmut de Boor ins Neuhochnochdeutsche übersetzt von Siegfried Grosse (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1997), 15; see also Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters*, 72–74.

⁵¹ *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose. The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001); a particularly gruesome rape scene can be found in Heinrich von dem Türlin's *Diu Crône* (ca. 1220, that is, contemporary to *Die Winsbeckin*). *The Crown. A Tale of Sir Gawain and King Arthur's Court* by Heinrich von dem Türlin, transl. and with an introduction by J. W. Thomas (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), vv. 11411–792, pp. 130–32; for a historical-critical edition, see Heinrich von dem Türlin, *Die Krone (Verse 1–12281)*, ed. Fritz Peter Knapp and Manuela Niesner. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek,

rely on her own heart to find out what man would be trustworthy and who not (18), but then she embarks on an attack against misogynistic rhetoric according to which all women have, following an ancient proverb, long hair and short reason.

Though she acknowledges that indeed some noble ladies have been guilty of this charge (19, 4), she appeals to all women to become role models and to learn how to discriminate between honorable and dishonorable men, as “diu spæte riuwe ist gar enwiht (20, 8; regret afterwards will not help at all). At this point her mother enters the discussion again and also assumes a more critical attitude toward courtly love which could blind people and lead them to the wrong path, especially if it is misunderstood as *eros*, or physical love, whereas she herself idealizes the elevated form of love, *agape*.⁵²

Not surprisingly, the daughter has to admit that she has not had any experiences with love and can only talk about it in theoretical terms, whereas the mother personally knows about its effects and can also relate historical examples of the power exerted by love, such as King Solomon whose wisdom did not prevent him from becoming subject to love (23, 6–7).⁵³ As this exchange demonstrates, the older person is sincerely worried about the well-being of her daughter and expresses her concern that the latter would not be able to withstand love’s charge, unless God would assist her (23, 9–10). The daughter observes that her mother’s heart once must have been touched by love, as she would otherwise not know so much about it (24), but the mother refrains from divulging all her secrets (25, 4); instead she advises her daughter to prepare herself for the arrival of the advanced form of love, “hôhiu minne” (25, 8), a combination of ethics and *eros* enacted in a public performance of courtly wooing by the man. It would be foolish to reject this love as it can only make the person honorable in the eyes of other honorable people (25, 10), especially because of the element of performance. With this description of courtly love she appeals to her daughter to be amenable to her advice, who in fact requests further information and declares her openness to any suggestions how to behave in case love would surreptitiously strike her (26).

Obviously, as Trude Ehlert, Ann Marie Rasmussen, and others have observed, in comparison with *Der Winsbecke*, this dialogue mostly (but not entirely) focuses

112 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000).

⁵² Rüdiger Schnell, *Causa amoris. Liebeskonzeption und Liebesdarstellung in der mittellalterlichen Literatur* (Bern and Munich: Francke, 1985), 232–33. Interestingly, Schnell once talks about the female poet “die Winsbeckin,” then he refers to “derselbe Dichter,” and finally returns, perhaps naively, to the assumption that the poet was a woman: “Die Winsbeckin.”

⁵³ Middle High German poets enjoyed utilizing the love discourse, especially between very young lovers, see Albrecht Classen, “Wolframs von Eschenbach *Titulel*-Fragmente und Johans von Würzburg *Wilhelm von Österreich*: Höhepunkte der höfischen Minnereden,” *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 37 (1993): 75–102; here, however, the experienced mother substitutes for the young man.

on women's erotic experiences and their relationship with the other gender. The mother does not teach her daughter anything about practical matters pertaining to running an aristocratic household, how to educate children, and does not inform her about political issues and social norms at the court. Instead, the dialogue focuses, at least to a major portion, on the effects of erotic love and how to avoid its pitfalls, especially when its pervasive force might overpower the young woman, who explicitly affirms that she would follow her mother's advice and would also ask her to put her in chains if she were ever to break her own vows (28, 9–10). The mother's response, however, offers an intriguing addition, as she does not want to be her daughter's guardian all her life. Instead, her daughter must learn how to watch out for herself and to acquire a firm mind which would protect her from the seductive force of love: "dîn stæter muot dîn hüeten muoz" (29, 2; your constant mind must protect you).

Both women obviously examine the temptation of sexual contacts and the danger of committing adultery if an attractive man might mislead the daughter to go to the (edge of the) forest where she could find her lover, a classical, though sometimes ambivalent *locus amoenus*, perhaps most beautifully developed by Walther von der Vogelweide in his "Under der linden."⁵⁴

IV. Women's Individuality and Independence in the Courtly World

The crucial aspect proves to be the freedom of an intelligent and mature woman who is entitled, as the daughter confirms, to manage her own life and to look after her own honor, whereas only those women who display foolish behavior ("tumber site," 30, 6) deserve to be controlled by society. The mother, however, does not want her daughter to think that women can handle their life without any advice from good friends. Friends should listen to each other's advice and pay attention to admonishments, as the ultimate goal proves to be honor (31, 5), which requires a solid social support system before it can be realized (31, 8–10).⁵⁵ Die Winsbeckin

⁵⁴ See, for instance, Walther von der Vogelweide, "Under der linden," 39, 11–40, 18.

⁵⁵ The Winsbeckin here resorts to the image of bears who rather can be tamed than a person who does not want to listen to friends' advice, which finds a direct parallel in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Titarel*, 92, 4; see Wilfried Kiefner, *Wolframs Titarel. Untersuchungen zu Metrik und Stil*. Ph. D. dissertation, Tübingen 1952, 39; see Brackert's and Fuchs-Jolie's commentary to their *Titarel* edition, 211; for a study of the topos 'forest' within medieval literature, see Corinne J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance. Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), 44–103; she also points out that at times the forest could be a site of danger and exile for the lovers, such as in the *Tristan* tradition, 103–13, which is also implied in *Die Winsbeckin*. For the significance of the communicative community for medieval society, as implied by the poet, see Albrecht Classen, *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung: Die Suche nach der kommunikativen Gemeinschaft in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2002).

here draws from an old tradition of philosophical friendship, dating back to classical literature, which had received particular attention from Bernard of Clairvaux and Aelred of Rievaulx during the twelfth century, and which had been so admirably practiced by Abelard and Heloise. Our mother-daughter dialogue, of course, does not reflect on these esoteric and highly intellectual friendships, nor does it relate to the religious friendship as espoused by Christina of Markyate and St Francis of Assisi, but Die Winsbeckin is clear about the great importance for women to enjoy the friendship of wise men.⁵⁶

Significantly, at this point Die Winsbeckin also insists on women's independence and claims that male supervision ("huote," 32, 1) would diminish a woman's honor. Moreover, she enters an important discussion of the true value of love ("liebe," 32, 4) which must develop on its own and be given freely, otherwise it would not inspire high spirits ("h  he[] muot[]," 32, 5) and would not be worth anything.⁵⁷ In other words, the mother is carefully but resolutely staking some space of freedom for herself and all women: "Diu huote ist w  bes   ren gram" (32, 1; control hurts women's honor), especially as enforced love cannot be called love (32, 4). Love must come from the heart and must be given freely, and it also must be determined by constancy, otherwise love would turn out to be a slippery matter, like ice (32, 9–10).

Die Winsbeckin here has stated a fundamental principle of social interaction that does not require any further discussion and is not questioned by her daughter either, who obviously fully accepts this teaching and embraces it as a model of behavior for herself, and which does not need any additional questioning. Subsequently the mother lets this topic go and returns to the issue of love in its courtly context that needs to be realized in an honorable fashion (33). The daughter, though she admits her complete ignorance and innocence in this area, expresses her strong love of and respect for her mother, and expects to receive the same in return (34, 2–6), thus encouraging her mother to reveal everything she knows about love.

Consequently, only now does the mother begin with her concrete instructions about love and follows, to some extent, the same model as developed by Andreas Capellanus in his famous treatise *De amore libri tres* (ca. 1185–1190), as she refers her daughter to Ovid who had called love "Venus" and who had explained that

⁵⁶ For a broad overview of the friendship motif, see Reginald Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship. The Idealization of Friendship in Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature*. Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 50 (Leiden, New York, and Cologne: Brill, 1994), 50–56. See also my studies: "Friendship in the Middle Ages: A Ciceronian Concept in Konrad von W  rzburg's *Engelhard* (ca. 1280)," to appear in *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch*; and: "Das Motiv des aufopfernden Freundes von der Antike   ber das Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit," *Fabula* 47, 1–2 (2006): 17–32.

⁵⁷ This is the same argument proposed by Walther von der Vogelweide in his "Saget mir ieman, waz ist minne?" (L 69, 1).

love would cause wounds and heal them as well, however, only to wound the same persons again (35, 4–7).⁵⁸ In her response, the daughter wonders about the unfair and unequal treatment of love, particularly if people of different social classes would fall in love with each other to the detriment of everybody involved, possibly causing severe conflicts. In fact, for her love appears to be a forceful, violent power which she regards with considerable suspicion (36, 8–10). Naturally, her mother tries to calm her down, assuring her that love disregards low-set minds and dishonorable people, and enhances the value of true honor in all people who are affected by her (37), in a way reiterating the ancient principle of nobility of love which supersedes socially determined nobility by birth.⁵⁹ But the daughter expresses discomfort with the idea that love could exert such force that she would lose her mind or become a helpless victim of love's manipulations (38). According to the mother, however, true love would never settle in a heart that would not be filled with a strong sense of honor (39), to which her daughter replies that she, though still a child, has seen many dishonorable acts committed because of love. Consequently, she keeps up her fight against love as it seems to be an untrustworthy element that could lower her own ethical standards and plunge her into vice (40). Only after her mother has blamed rashness and inconsiderateness as responsible for the loss of public honor (41), does the daughter finally acquiesce and accept courtly love as a valuable ideal to which she would subscribe if it affected her as well (42). Once this agreement has been reached, the daughter asks for the concrete rules of love which her mother knows in detail (43, 5) and which she then freely shares with her daughter (44–45), as if she had read Andreas Capellanus's *De amoris* in great detail.

Remarkably, contrary to the recent interpretations of the mother's "minne regel" (43, 5; teachings of love), as offered by Trude Ehlert and Ann Marie Rasmussen, here the mother does not simply indoctrinate her daughter how to perform in

⁵⁸ Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*. With Introduction, transl. and notes by John Jay Parry. Records of Western Civilization (1960; New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). Though Capellanus does not specifically refer his reader to Ovid, the entire treatise is modelled after Ovid's *Ars amatoria*. See Rüdiger Schnell, *Causa amoris*, 232–33: "All diese Aussagen wecken den Eindruck, als ob es sich bei der *vrô Minne* um ein von den Menschen losgelöstes Wesen, mit göttlicher Macht versehen, handle, die die sog. 'Zwangsminne', die 'magische Venusminne' hervorbringt. Umso erstaunter wird man konstatieren, daß derselbe [!] Dichter sich entschieden gegen eine durch äußere Einflüsse (durch *huote*) erzwungene Liebe wendet" (All these statements evoke the impression as if *lady love* represents a being separated from people, filled with divine power, and which creates the so-called 'enforced love,' the 'magical love of Venus.' With great astonishment we will have to admit that the same [!] poet decisively turned against a form of love enforced through external influences).

⁵⁹ Volker Honemann, "Aspekte des 'Tugendadels' im europäischen Spätmittelalter," *Literatur und Laienbildung im Spätmittelalter und in der Reformationszeit*, ed. Ludger Grenzmann and Karl Stackmann. Germanistische Symposien Berichtsbände, 5 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984), 274–288.

public with the intention of winning a man's love. Rasmussen claims, for example: "*Die Winsbeckin* assumes that women must be taught how to inhabit the sociosexual function that is expected of them. With her instructions, the mother is initiating her daughter into the honorable behavior that is expected of her as a noblewoman She assumes that a social female identity is synonymous with sexual identity" ⁶⁰ By contrast, the debate is clearly predicated on the hope that people would gain personal happiness through love, accomplished through an open and communicative approach, as represented by the mother-daughter dialogue.

If we consider the mother's arguments more closely, we discover an intensive moralizing approach to the norms and rules being offered to her daughter: a woman should not be envious of another (43, 9); women should pay attention to the advice of wise people and stay away from cowards and those characterized by unsteadiness (44, 4-5); women need to avoid those people who harbor evil thoughts about women, that is, misogynists and rapists (44, 6-7); women should establish solid communication with honorable people by way of public greetings (44, 9-10); women should avoid evil thoughts and hatred and aspire for a cheerful mood (45, 2-3); and women would do best if they embraced female virtues and habits (45, 4-5). If women were to follow all these recommendations, they would always be protected by good fortune and honor; otherwise they would face the danger of losing their good reputation because of an illicit love affair (45, 8-10). ⁶¹ In other words, *Die Winsbeckin* — whether a male or a female poet — does not only address the issue of women's relationship to love. Much more important proves to be that she is deeply concerned with her daughter's honor, public reputation, intellectual, ethical, and moral development, which explains why she provides her with such substantial teachings of global relevance for the well-being of human society. ⁶²

Whereas Trude Ehlert assumed that the mother's teachings aim for a conditioning of the girl according to male ideals, commodifying the young woman as an object of erotic desire by the male audience, ⁶³ our reading points into a

⁶⁰ Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters*, 158.

⁶¹ This is exactly the same conclusion which Christine de Pizan reaches in her didactic verse romance *Livre du duc des vrais amans* (1403-1405); see the comments to the critical edition by Thelma S. Fenster (1995), 11, 25-26, 32-33; in the text itself, see 171-80.

⁶² This goes very much conform with the observations about the true essence and meaning of courtly love proposed by James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 171: "In general, courtly love, like courtliness, is a discipline that brings distinction." See also the second chapter in his book: "The Sexual Identity of Courtly Lovers."

⁶³ Ehlert, "Die Frau als Arznei," 61: insists that the mother's purpose for her daughter is "Ansehen in der Gesellschaft zu gewinnen, das Begehren der Männer auf sich zu lenken und auf nicht normenkonform handelnde Männer erzieherisch einzuwirken" (to gain honor in society, to attract

different direction. The experience of erotic love certainly looms large on the mother's horizon, but she does not exhaust herself in teaching her daughter about proper approaches to love as the medium to marriage; instead she mostly emphasizes social, ethical, and moral issues for her daughter's individual development. Such parental advice became almost the norm in later centuries, when most aristocratic mothers made specific efforts to provide their daughters with a basic and solid education.⁶⁴

V. Male Parody of Female Positions

The subsequent *Winsbeckin* parody, six stanzas of which are contained in the Vienna manuscript (P, Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Vind. Ser. nov. 3809), and sixteen of which are in the Copenhagen manuscript (W, Königliche Bibliothek, Ny kgl. Saml. 662, 8°, 4), indicates that a later poet felt deeply irritated by these female voices and ridiculed the mother's advice since she seemed to him (!) to be a prostitute who had no right to teach her daughter anything about honor and morality. Obviously, *Die Winsbeckin*, by whomever it might have been, provoked a misogynist writer to fight against this poetic dialogue and the "feminist" implications:

ich main: so du von bete stast,
brist ungesegent für die tür;
daz maul du spitz alsam ein stür
oder zerr ez weiten auf (I, 3–6)

[I am sure when you get up from bed, you will go out of the door without any blessing; you pout your lips like a sturgeon, or you open it wide.]

Interestingly, both the medieval manuscript illustrator and the parodist assumed that they dealt with a didactic poem composed by a woman, or by two women. This perspective can no longer be maintained in such simplicity, but it also seems unwarranted to jump to the opposite conclusion, as virtually all modern scholars have done, and reject outright the possibility that *Die Winsbeckin* could have been composed by a woman. The criticism of mythical thinking does not gain the high ground through reversed mythical ideology. No external evidence comes to our help in deciding the issue whether we are dealing with female literature or a thinly veiled didactic text by a male poet. Significantly, the opposite thesis—male

men's desire, and to exert a pedagogical influence on men who do not act according the norms).
⁶⁴ Cornelia Niekus Moore, *The Maiden's Mirror. Reading Material for German Girls in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Wolfenbütteler Forschungen, 36 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987), 108–12, even knows of marriage treatises composed by mothers for their nubile daughters.

authorship—can also not be confirmed as the author does not include any clues about the personal intentions and functions of this text, and does not, important to note, explicitly favor male perspectives regarding the gender relationship.

Nevertheless, our close reading has unearthed a number of significant aspects that offer new perspectives in the evaluation of this poem and allow us to analyze the intentions and historical context on the basis of a refined philological analysis and with a higher degree of sensitivity regarding the communicative message and gender-specific function contained in the text.⁶⁵

Although mother and daughter at first disagree with respect to the meaning and social function of courtly love, ultimately they overcome this difference because they connect love with honor, and subsequently honor with women's standing in society.⁶⁶ Certainly, the concluding advice implies that women are always faced by the danger of being sexually abused, but it would be erroneous to claim that, according to the mother's advice, women "remain within the economy of male desire, and that the fundamental purpose of female virtue is to make women sexually available to men" (Rasmussen).⁶⁷ As we have seen, the mother talks about women's honor that must be guarded at all times, an advice which could be used in any rape-prevention literature today as well. More important, however, the mother turns to those whom she regards as "wise people" and admonishes her daughter to associate only with them, not with those who aim for the destruction of women's reputation (44). She explicitly evokes the old tradition of misogynist discourse, when she warns of those who "eiter in den zungen tragen, / besnîden sinneclîch diu wort" (44, 7–8;⁶⁸ carry puss on their tongues / and maliciously manipulate reasonable words). Finally, the mother turns to general ethical teachings and recommends to her daughter to abstain from feelings of envy and hatred, to aim for feminine behavior—whatever these might imply—noble intentions ("guot," 45, 4), and virtuous happiness or wisdom ("vruot," 45, 5).⁶⁹ In

⁶⁵ It goes without saying that *Die Winsbeckin* reflects a general interest in didactic love poems and theoretical treatments of courtly love, see Ingeborg Glier, *Artes amandi: Untersuchung zu Geschichte, Überlieferung und Typologie der deutschen Minnereden*. Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 34 (Munich: Beck, 1971), 32–35.

⁶⁶ Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters*, 149, still assumed that the mother "banishes any evidence of its [love's] contradictions" and that she "is largely demonstrating how to talk about love."

⁶⁷ Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters*, 150.

⁶⁸ For a collection of pertinent misogynistic texts, see *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended. An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); see also Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁶⁹ Matthias Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Taschenwörterbuch*. 34th ed. (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 1976), for "guot," 76, he lists: "gutes (durch, in guot in guter absicht, in gutem sinne, . . . gut, vermögen, besitz; landgut," and for "vruot," 300, he lists: "verständigkeit, instinkt, weisheit, schönheit, fröhlichkeit, himmlische seligkeit."

other words, the mother does not actually teach her daughter how to prepare herself as a sexual object for male-dominated society. Instead, she tries to help her to acquire virtue and wisdom as a woman within the context of the courtly world and courtly love.

Would it be entirely unreasonable to argue that a woman could have composed this dialogue poem? Would it be really impossible to assume that these advices and the generic teachings were the result of a mother's personal experiences who wanted to share them with her audience? Of course, we can never forget that we are dealing with a literary projection, as implied by the introductory verses: "Ein wîplich wîp in zûhten sprach / zir tohter, der si schône phlac:" (1, 1-2; an honorable woman said in a well educated manner to her daughter whom she loved dearly). It seems especially unwise to follow Trude Ehlert's global assumption that with a "Bewußtsein einer Eigenwertigkeit der Frau zu dieser Zeit noch nicht zu rechnen ist" (we cannot expect to discover any form of women's self-consciousness at that time).⁷⁰ Otherwise we would have to dismiss the testimony of Hildegard von Bingen, Elisabeth von Schönau, Frau Ava, Dhuoda, and many others.⁷¹ On that premise, for instance, we would have to accept the possibility that Marie de France was a pseudonym for a male author, a most absurd notion scholarship has never entertained.

Even though we have only few examples, such as the Latin dramas by Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim, the letters by Héloïse to her lover, and subsequent husband, Abélard, the *Lais* by Marie de France, not to forget the Provençal troubairitz, and the Old Norwegian and Old Icelandic Skáldonur,⁷² the poet of *Die Winsbeckin* contributes, quite on her (his?) own terms, to the interest in women's issue during the high Middle Ages, such as their gender roles, their function within aristocratic society, their speech performance, and their relevance for public culture. Since we are in no absolute position to decide unequivocally whether a woman composed the text—or to disprove this thesis—we can at least confirm that the dialogue poem clearly addresses a female audience and unmistakably advises

⁷⁰ Ehlert, "Die Frau als Arznei," 62.

⁷¹ *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*. Vol. 1: *Vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1988).

⁷² See, for example, *Listening to Heloise. The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler. The New Middle Ages (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); see also the powerful introduction by Cristina Mazzoni in *Angela of Foligno's Memorial*, transl. from Latin with Introduction, Notes and Interpretive Essay. Library of Medieval Women, transl. John Cirignano (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 1-19; Albrecht Classen, *Late-Medieval German Women's Poetry: Secular and Religious Songs*, transl. from the German with Introduction, Notes and Interpretive Essay. Library of Medieval Women (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 113-16.

young woman about the ideal approach to adult life from an ethical, moral, social, and also erotic perspective.⁷³

The mother's concerns are not, as one might assume, to prepare her daughter for marriage and sexuality per se, instead she demonstrates to her how to gain independence, how to look out for her own honor and to protect her female reputation. The daughter learns of the dangers that come with a too loose approach to sexuality, and how to find a support group among those considered to be wise people. Extraordinarily, the mother understands that she cannot simply teach her daughter the basic lessons and then assume that she has fulfilled the expectations in her as a mother. Therefore she enters an intensive debate with her daughter to fathom all relevant issues and to share her personal experiences.

Moreover, in clear contrast to the son who remains silent for the most part during his father's lecture (*Der Winsbecke*), the daughter is determined to make her voice, her opinion, and her arguments heard although she does not close her mind and is receptive to her mother's well-formulated advice. In other words, here we come across an impressive discourse involving two fully communicative women who reflect great love for each other and a remarkable willingness to pay attention to the other's concepts, ideas, and suggestions. The level of sharing ideas, experiences, opinions and the development of their mutual learning process are impressive and do not find many comparable examples in medieval literature, especially as most other didactic poems reflect the failure of a parent trying to teach a son the basic lessons of adult life.⁷⁴

This does not necessarily imply that *Die Winsbeckin* was composed by a female poet, as a male author might just as well have been able to compose such a dialogue between mother and daughter, particularly as *Der Winsbecke* already provided the basic model for the didactic discourse. The rich tradition of women's songs, or *chansons de toile*, demonstrates that men's poetic repertoire could easily have included texts written from a woman's perspective and in a woman's voice, but this does not mean that all women's songs were indeed composed by men.⁷⁵

⁷³ For a panoply of various approaches to this topics, see *Young Medieval Women*, ed. Katherine J. Lewis et al.

⁷⁴ This is best exemplified by Wernher the Gardener's *Meier Helmbrecht* (ca. 1240). See Albrecht Classen, *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung. Die Suche nach der kommunikativen Gemeinschaft in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., et al.: Peter Lang, 2002), see especially 196–97. For the example of a father teaching his daughters, see *Le livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry pour l'enseignement de ses filles* (1371–1372).

⁷⁵ I have discussed this intricate question in greater detail in my "Einleitung" to *Deutsche Frauenlieder des fünfzehnten und sechzehnten Jahrhunderts. Authentische Stimmen in der deutschen Frauenliteratur der Frühneuzeit oder Vertreter einer poetischen Gattung (das "Frauenlied")?* Einleitung, Edition und Kommentar von Albrecht Classen. *Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur*, 136 (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 1999); for remarkable North French examples, see *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, ed., transl., and introd. Eglal Doss-Quinby, Joan Tasker Grimbert, Wendy

Although we do not have specific evidence available as to the reception of *Die Winsbeckin* during the late Middle Ages,⁷⁶ both the open discussion and the mutual respect, then the clearly identifiable individual voices and the convincing arguments on both sides strongly suggest that this poem was intended for a female audience and utilized all the necessary narrative strategies to convince the contemporary listeners/readers that a woman had composed the text. Not surprisingly, the illustrator of the Winsbeckin miniature in the *Manesse* manuscript accepted the basic framework of *Die Winsbeckin* and naively, though certainly not unreasonably, assumed that *Die Winsbeckin* indeed had been a woman.

VI. Female Didacticism: the Case of Christine de Pizan

For a brief comparison of how other medieval women talked to their daughters, which will certainly strengthen our hypothetical argument of female authorship in the case of this Middle High German didactic poem, let us finally examine the pragmatic approaches taken by Christine de Pizan who, in her *Le livre des trois vertus* (Treasure of the City of Ladies, 1405), specifically addresses women of various social ranks and stages in life in order to offer them a solid education of how to perform within courtly society. This didactic text seems to be an appropriate choice for our comparison as most other narratives with pedagogical instructions for women were written by men, such as *Le livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry pour l'enseignement de ses filles* (1371–72) and *Le Ménagier de Paris* (1394).⁷⁷

Having published her *Book of the City of Ladies* in 1404 as her final statement in the debate concerning women's status in society, in the arts, in education, and literature (the so-called *querelle des femmes*),⁷⁸ Christine turned to didactic writing with her *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, also called *The Book of the Three Virtues*. As Sarah Lawson formulates it, the *Treasure* was "[p]art etiquette book, part survival manual, [] written for women who had to live from day to day in the world as it was."⁷⁹ Indeed, Christine placed most of her emphasis on the general advice to

Pfeffer, Elizabeth Aubrey (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁷⁶ Wolfgang Harms, "Des Winsbeckes Genius," 46–49, examines a new wave of reception of the *Winsbecke* poem, but he does not inform us how the poem had passed down the centuries until 1604, when Melchior Goldast produced the first printed edition.

⁷⁷ Roberta L. Krueger, "'Nouvelles Choses.' Social Instability and the Problem of Fashion in the *Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry*, the *Ménagier de Paris*, and Christine de Pizan's *Livre des trois vertus*," *Medieval Conduct*, ed. Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark, 49–85.

⁷⁸ *Die europäische Querelle des Femmes. Geschlechterdebatten seit dem 15. Jahrhundert*, ed. Gisela Bock and Margarete Zimmermann. *Querelles*, 2 (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 1997).

⁷⁹ Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies or The Book of the Three Virtues*, transl. with an introd. by Sarah Lawson (London: Penguin, 1985), 21. For a critical edition, see Christine de Pisan,

courtly ladies how to establish a functioning communication with all members of court society "to keep a good reputation and also to render the narrow life of the court livable."⁸⁰ In her own words: "A tout le colliege femenin et a leur devote religion soit notifié le sermon et la leçon de Sapience. Et tout premierement pour ce que estat de majesté royale et de seigneurie est eslevé sur tous estaz mondains, et que il est de neccessité que ceulx et celles, tans femmes comme hommes que Dieux a establiz es haulz sieges de poissance et dominacion soient mieulz moriginéz que aultre gent afin que la reputacion d'eulx en soit plus venerable et que ilz puissent estre a leurs subgiéz et a ceulz qui les frequentent" (9; "May all the feminine colleagues and their devout community be apprised of the sermons and lessons of wisdom. First of all to the queens, princesses and great ladies, and then on down the social scale we will chant our doctrine to the other ladies and maidens and all classes of women, so that the syllabus of our school may be valuable to all;" 32).

In her realistic mindset, Christine warns the high-born princess of the many temptations that might affect her (36–37; 12–13), but she places all her trust in God and in a strong belief system which would combat these temptations (37–41; 14–20). She strongly advocates humility as one of the most important feminine virtues (47–50; 28–33) and urges women to seek the company "de sages preudeshommes et de bonne vie, qui seront de son conseil" (32; "of wise and upright gentlemen who will counsel her;" 49). Subsequent chapters in Christine's treatise bear considerable resemblance with *Die Winsbeckin*, as she emphasizes the value of prudence, reputation, and honor: "Prudence tout premierement enseignera a la princepce ou haulte dame comment sur toutes les choses de ce bas monde doit aimer honneur et bonne renomee . . . et se elle vit moralment elle aimera le bien de renomee, qui est honneur" (41; "First of all Prudence teaches the princess or great lady how above all things in this base world she ought to love honour and a good reputation . . . and if she lives morally she will love the blessing of a good reputation, which is honour;" 55). This reputation can be acquired through "bonnes meurs" (42; "good manners and behaviour;" 55), together with sobriety and chastity (56; 43), magnificence, truth, confidence, controlled speech, and eloquence (57; 44), all aspects which are more or less addressed by the *Winsbeckin* as well. Almost in an ironic intertextual approach, Christine also recommends that a noble lady "lira volentiers livres d'enseignemens de bonnes meurs et aucunes fois de devocion" (45; "read

Le livre des trois vertus, ed. critique. Introduction et notes par Charity Cannon Willard. Texte établi en collaboration avec Eric Hicks (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1989). When there is only a page reference without a quote, this reference pertains to the English translation only.

⁸⁰ Lawson, introduction, Christine de Pisan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, 22.

instructive books about good manners and behaviour and sometimes devotion;" 58), as if she had the Middle High German dialogue poem in mind.

Much more concretely, however, than the *Winsbeckin*, the French author also examines the role which the reasonable and wise lady should assume at court, relying on "sages preudhommes certaine quantité, qui seront de son conseil" (49; "wise gentlemen who will sit on her council;" 60). Whereas the *Winsbeckin* had discussed strategies for her daughter how to discriminate between honorable men as potential lovers, and how to perform in the world of courtly love, Christine assumes that her female readers are already married and need instructions how to behave toward their husbands: "Le premier de ces .vii. points et rigles que nous enseignons est que toute dame qui aime honneur . . . et vive en paix avec lui. . . se rendra humble vers lui en fait, en reverence et en parole, l'obeira sans murmuracion et gardera sa paix a son pouoir" (52–53; "The first of these seven rules . . . is that she love her husband and live in peace with him. . . [S]he will humble herself towards him, in deed and word and by curtsying; she will obey without complaint; and she will hold her peace to the best of her ability;" 62–63).

Like the author of the *Winsbeckin* poem, Christine also knows that not all men can be trusted or would be passionate and loyal lovers. Instead, problems would certainly arise in marriage, but the wife would be best advised in such case to take refuge in God (64): "son reffuge sera a Dieu" (55) because: "Et lui apprendra Prudence que plus grant honneur ne puet estre dit de dame et de toute femme que dire que elle soit vraye et loyalle vers son seigneur" (56; "no greater honour can be said of a lady or any woman than that she is true and loyal to her husband;" 65). With respect to her daughters, a mother should "sera diligente que ilz soient bien endoctrinéz" (60; "be diligent about their education;" 67), which specifically implies religious teaching, an aspect we hear nothing about in *Die Winsbeckin*.

By contrast, *Der Winsbecke* concludes his teachings with specific invocations of Christ and a sermon-like appeal to God to protect his soul from eternal condemnation (stanzas 65–80). Both Christine and the *Winsbeckin* warn of evil courtiers and spies who could undermine the woman's reputation through false accusations: "tant que la personne est meilleur et plus vertueuse, tant lui fait envie, souvent avient, greigneur guerre" (62; "The better and more virtuous a lady is, the greater the war Envy very often makes against her;" 69). Christine, however, turns upside down one of the more important arguments brought forth by the *Winsbeckin*, as she advises ladies who command over a court to forbid all male courtiers to play the game of courtly love: "pour ce que c'est chose assez acoustumee que chevaliers et escuiers et tous hommes qui frequentent entour femmes, par especial les aucuns, ont maniere de les prier d'amours et de les attraire se ilz peuvent, la sage princepce par ses ordenances tendra tel maniere qu'il n'y aura nul repairant a sa court si hardy qui a nulle de ses femmes ose conseiller a part ne faire semblant d'attrait" (72; "Since it is the established custom that

knights and squires and all men . . . who associate with women have a habit of pleading for love tokens from them and trying to seduce them, the wise princess will so enforce her regulations that there will be no visitor to her court so foolhardy as to dare to whisper privately with any of her women or give the appearance of seduction;" 75).

Turning to courtly ladies as a group, her main audience, Christine admonishes them—and here again we find close parallels with the advice given by *Die Winsbeckin*—"se contiennent entre chevaliers et escuiers et tous hommes par beau maintien, dient leurs paroles simplement et coyement, et s'esbatent et solacent, soit en dances ou autres esbatemens, gracieusement et sans lubrece" (72–73; "The women should restrain themselves with seemly conduct among knights and squires and all men. They should speak demurely and sweetly and, whether in dances or other amusements, divert and enjoy themselves decorously and without wantonness;" 75).

In the subsequent sections of the *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, Christine turns to economic, political, social, and religious aspects, which go far beyond the thematic range explored by *Die Winsbeckin*. Nevertheless, the amount of common elements in both texts is striking, but these parallels do not come as a complete surprise since we know that Christine dedicated her book to the eleven years old Marguerite of Nevers, the eldest daughter of the Duke of Burgundy on the occasion of her marriage to the heir to the French throne, Louis of Guyenne, in the summer of 1405.⁸¹ In other words, both the *Winsbeckin* poet and Christine perceived the great need to instruct young women how to perform within the world of the courts, how to handle the dialectics of eroticism and love, and how to gain public respect and honor. Both authors were deeply concerned about slander and sexual temptations at court that could ruin a young woman's social standing. But both were confident that their teachings would provide the relevant framework for the addressees and help them steer through the maze of courtly life.⁸²

⁸¹ Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan. Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea Books, 1984), 146.

⁸² As the Middle English poem *The Babees Book* indicates, instructional literature for young children and young adults was of great concern for many writers, whether female or male. Here quoted from *The Babees Book*, Aristotle's A B C, Urbanitatis, Stans Puer ad Mesam, The Lytille Childrenes Lytil Boke, *The Bokes of Nurture of Hugh Rhodes and John Russell*, . . . , ed. Frederick J. Furnivall. Early English Text Society, Original Series, 32 (London: Trübner, 1868).

VII. Conclusion

The conclusions of our analysis and comparison do not allow us to identify the author of the *Winsbeckin* poem any more in concrete terms, but this was not our specific purpose either. Certainly, the similarities with Christine's *Treasure of the City of Ladies* are highly noteworthy, but it would not have been impossible for a thirteenth-century male writer to formulate these general teachings for young women as well, especially as many male authors demonstrated great interest in discussing women's lives, characters, and public performance, such as the authors of *La Contenance des Femes*, *Le Bien des Femes*, and *Le Blasme des Femes*,⁸³ or Thomasin of Zirklære, and Philippe de Novare,⁸⁴ not to forget the fairly large corpus of woman's songs, composed by male poets as part of their efforts to diversify their repertoire.⁸⁵ We have also observed in the previous chapters how much male courtly poets addressed the problem of violence against women in public and even raised their voice against the devastating effects of domestic violence.

The true significance of the comparison between *Die Winsbeckin* and Christine's *Treasure* rests in the observation that specific female issues, women's social, ethical, and moral concerns, women's education, and personal discussions between mother and daughter could be the topic of medieval literature. There is no reason to assume that *Die Winsbeckin* is characterized by comic elements, or to claim satire which the poet might have aimed at in the father-son dialogue, as Rasmussen argues. Neither the mother's authority nor the daughter's sincere interest in learning the principles of courtly lifestyle are undermined, and it would be unfair to blame the mother figure for allegedly trying to mold her daughter as an exact copy of herself.⁸⁶

⁸³ *Three Medieval Views of Women. La Contenance des Femes, Le Bien des Femes, Le Blasme des Femes*, transl. and edited by Gloria K. Fiero, Wendy Pfeffer, Mathé Allain (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁸⁴ Joachim Bumke, *Höfische Kultur*. Vol. 2, 477–83.

⁸⁵ *And Anthology of Ancient and Medieval Woman's Song*, ed. Anne L. Klinck (New York and London: Palgrave, 2004).

⁸⁶ Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters*, 153. Rasmussen goes so far as to suggest, 156: "[f]or all of the comic dissonances separating mother from daughter (and, indeed, each from herself), their types tend to merge and the daughter's fate may duplicate the mother's." Neither the characterization of mother and daughter nor their dialogue justifies such a "poststructural" reading; see my critique of Rasmussen's position in "Die Mutter spricht zu ihrer Tochter. Literatursoziologische Betrachtungen zu einem feministischen Thema," *German Quarterly* 75, 1 (2002): 71–87; and 75, 2 (2002): 159.

On the contrary, in light of Christine de Pizan's *Treasure* we can now claim that *Die Winsbeckin* represents a remarkable effort by an anonymous author to shed light on the education of young women, to illustrate how mothers and daughters might or even should talk with each other, and to demonstrate how much communicative strategies can contribute to a reasonable, open-minded education process. Critics might reject this reading as overly optimistic, but there are no concrete clues that would suggest any misogynistic, manipulative, satirical, or concretely identifiable patriarchal strategies, at least not to the extent that a woman poet could not also have subscribed to the basic ideals expressed in these verses. Both in the case of Christine's *Treasure* and *Die Winsbeckin*, we are confronted by female voices whose discourse serves as a model for female audiences. From this perspective, it does not matter whether *Die Winsbeckin* was composed by a man or a woman, which we might never be able to determine with hundred percent guarantee. We can, however, affirm that this dialogue poem strongly appealed to female readers and presented explicitly female perspectives, insofar as the young woman gains a remarkable independence in the formation of her opinion, whereas the mother expresses her sincere concern for her daughter's physical well-being and her political, moral, and ethical reputation.

Die Winsbeckin operates on the premise that women, especially those within a close kinship, share fundamental information with each other, provide emotional support, and make sure that the adolescents learn how to operate within the world of the courts. The same can be claimed for Christine's *Treasure*, and, from this comparative perspective our new reading of *Die Winsbeckin* might not be so far off the mark as it situates this dialogue poem in its appropriate context: a text about women, for women, and, perhaps, also by a woman.

Chapter Six

Domestic Violence in Medieval and Early-Modern German, French, Italian, and English Literature (Marie de France, Boccaccio, and Geoffrey Chaucer)¹

I. Violence against Women in Light of the History of Mentality

In this chapter I will examine a wide range of medieval and early-modern narratives in which violence between husband and wife—that is, violence within the private sphere and not in public, which I discussed in the first chapter—erupts and threatens not only their marriage, but also the well-being of the entire social community. Instead of focusing on the topic of women’s voices directly, as in the previous chapters, the purpose here is to investigate, above all, male perspectives concerning their female partners within marriage and the degree to which male authors noticed, commented on, and dealt with violent treatment of women. But I will also look into some examples of women’s writing in which domestic violence finds significant expression. The critical question for us will be what a representative group of mostly German authors have to say about this phenomenon, how they describe the actions taken by the authorities in response to this violence, and what the narratives themselves reveal about social conditions leading to domestic violence, primarily affecting women. I will begin with the analysis of some sixteenth-century tales, and then slowly work my way backwards in time.

Within the broad framework of this study on women’s voices, women’s roles, and women’s legal and social situation in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, it seems most pertinent also to investigate what various authors of fictional texts had to say about women’s mistreatment at the hand of their husbands and

¹ I would like to thank Marilyn Sandidge for her critical reading of this chapter.

male relatives (and sometimes vice versa). Most scholars who work on violence in medieval society limit themselves to military violence and ignore violence within the domestic, or private, sphere, although the latter often developed into public scandals.² Literary statements prove to be particularly relevant because they reflect either common practices that do not seem to require special treatment in legal documents and chronicles, or they represent individual voices dealing critically with the phenomenon of domestic violence, possibly advocating to combat it as a social evil. Fictional texts are not solid mirrors of historical reality, yet they reflect general assumptions, values, ideals, moral and ethical principles, and, above all, the mental structure dominant in a specific society. If we accept this premise—which would certainly require much more intensive treatment than possible here³—we will have available an enormous range of literary documents of highly relevant information regarding the domestic situation in the world of the aristocrats and the city dwellers. We will also discover that violence within marriage was not always directed against women, but could also badly affect weak husbands, though we will always have to consider the narrative strategies behind such accounts.⁴ This approach in our study of this type of medieval violence is critically informed by the theoretical approach of *histoire de mentalité*, or *Mentalitätsgeschichte*, which investigates people's attitudes, fears, dreams, deep-seated concepts, imaginations, and opinions as reflected in popular literature, art works, music, sermons, penitentials, and chronicles.⁵ Moreover, literary documents traditionally draw from stereotypes, ideologically ingrained concepts

² See, for example, Peter Haidu, "Violence," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages: Supplement 1*, ed. William Chester Jordan (New York, Detroit, et al.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004), 624–28; for a different approach, see *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature: A Casebook*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

³ Cf. the Preface by Catherine Belsey in her *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden: The Construction of Family Values in Early Modern Culture* (Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2001); for a broad and diverse approach, see *Reading the Past: Literature and History*, ed. Tamsin Spargo (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave, 2000); with a focus on German literature, see Elisabeth Wäghäll Nivre, *Women and Family Life in Early Modern German Literature*. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, NY, and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2004), 3–8.

⁴ Louise O. Vasvári, "'Buon cavallo e mal cavallo vuole sprone, e buona femina e mala femina vuol bastone': Medieval Cultural Fictions of Wife Battering," *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early-Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 278 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 313–36. She takes a somewhat extreme view regarding accounts of husbands being beaten by their wives since they represent nothing but weak members of their sex, 333.

⁵ *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte: Hauptthemen in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. Peter Dinzelbacher. Kröners Taschenausgabe, 469 (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1993), XV–XXVII; see also Dinzelbacher's recent study, *Europa im Hochmittelalter 1050–1250: Eine Kultur- und Mentalitätsgeschichte*. Kultur und Mentalität (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2003), 133–36.

about gender relations, and especially reveal unofficial, especially private, power structures when they intend to be humorous.⁶

II. Jörg Wickram

In one of the many stories by the Colmar city council clerk Jörg Wickram included in his highly popular collection of entertaining, and also didactic, narratives, *Rollwagenbüchlein*, from 1555, we hear of a young man who wants to marry, finds a bride, arranges the marriage, and prepares the wedding ceremony according to the customs of his time.⁷ A major problem erupts, however, that prevents him from following through with the wedding plans. When he and his future wife approach the church door where the priest is awaiting them, the latter smiles at the young bride. Delighted by his friendliness, and probably in anticipation of the important ceremony, she innocently smiles back at him. Unfortunately, the bridegroom immediately mistakes all these nonverbal exchanges as secret signals revealing a love affair that must have existed between the priest and the bride. Not interested in exploring the true circumstances, the young jealous man punches his bride right in her face to avenge his feeling of having been hurt and insulted. All people present observe this with great surprise, perhaps even with shock, and consequently some of them report this event to the authorities. These do not hesitate to take actions and quickly apprehend the bridegroom and throw him into prison where he has to wait for several weeks before they let him go free again. The narrator gives his full approval to this punishment which protects the innocent bride and asserts the power of the urban authorities: "das dann auch sein verdienter lohn was" (which then was his well-earned punishment).⁸ Even though it would be difficult to relate this tale to a concrete historical event, Wickram refers to trustworthy accounts, emphasizing that the young man came from Pforzheim, suggesting that these events were contained in verifiable reports and were not only fictional hearsay. Whatever the case may be, his narrative directly deals with the issue of domestic violence and raises profound questions.

⁶ From a feminist perspective, see Louise O. Vasvári, "'Buon cavallo,'" 313–36.

⁷ Erich Kleinschmidt, "Jörg Wickram," *Deutsche Dichter der frühen Neuzeit (1450–1600). Ihr Leben und Werk*, ed. Stephan Füßel (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1993), 495–511; Albrecht Classen, Witz, Humor, Satire. Georg Wickrams *Rollwagenbüchlein* als Quelle für sozialhistorische und mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studien zum 16. Jahrhundert. Oder: Vom kommunikativen und gewalttätigen Umgang der Menschen in der Frühneuzeit," *Jahrbuch der ungarischen Germanistik* (1999): 13–30.

⁸ Georg Wickram, *Das Rollwagenbüchlein*. Sämtliche Werke, Vol. 7. Ausgaben deutscher Literatur des XV. bis XVII. Jahrhunderts (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1973), No. 87: "Ein Junger Gesell schlug sein Brawt vor der Kirchen in das angesicht." (166).

For us, then, the critical issue proves to be the explicit treatment, i.e., condemnation, of domestic violence which the authorities deem necessary to contain, if not to suppress as a danger for the well-being of the entire community.⁹ Moreover, the narrative's humor rests on the not too subtle reference to well-known love affairs between priests and female members of their parish, even though in this case the young man's suspicions prove to be entirely erroneous. Anticlericalism and explicit criticism of domestic violence merge and form the decisive and powerful message in this short prose narrative.¹⁰ Insofar as this community is governed by "Herrschaften und Oberkeiten" (lords and authorities), the officials do not hesitate to intercede immediately and to protect the bride from her fiancé's physical brutality. In other words, the young woman finds protection both by the community at large and by the city council, which suggests that according to Wickram the private life shared by husband and wife—and this even before their actual marriage—was not exempt from public scrutiny and was not a free range for the man to exert his absolute patriarchal power within the domestic sphere.¹¹

In another case, no. 55, the wife is not as lucky and has to pay with her life when a fight breaks out with her husband.¹² A number of contradictory elements in this account shed significant light on the question of how domestic violence was evaluated at that time. In the first place, the narrator condemns the ill effects of alcoholism which led the husband to enter an egregious and entirely foolish exchange agreement with another inn keeper involving both their properties.¹³ His

⁹ The many cases brought before the Basel marriage courts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is the topic of Susanna Burghartz's *Zeiten der Reinheit, Orte der Unzucht. Ehe und Sexualität in Basel während der Frühen Neuzeit* (Paderborn, Munich, et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1999), especially 229–33. See my review in *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 109, 1–2 (2000): 223–26.

¹⁰ *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Peter A. Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman. Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, LI (Leiden, New York, and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1993); for the specific topos of the lecherous priest, see Birgit Beine, *Der Wolf in der Kutte. Geistliche in den Mären des deutschen Mittelalters*. Braunschweiger Beiträge zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur, 2 (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1999), 123–37.

¹¹ This phenomenon is richly discussed by Heide Wunder, *"Er ist die Sonn', sie ist der Mond". Frauen in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich: Beck, 1992); see also Rüdiger Schnell, "Macht im Dunkeln: Welchen Einfluß hatten Ehefrauen auf ihre Männer? Geschlechterkonstrukte in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit," *Zivilisationsprozesse: Zu Erziehungsschriften in der Vormoderne*, ed. id. (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2004), 309–29.

¹² No. 55: "Ein grawsame und erschrockenliche History / so sich auch von wegen eines kauffs oder tauschs zûgetragen hatt" (110).

¹³ A. Lynn Martin, *Alcohol, Sex, and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Early Modern History: Society and Culture (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave, 2001), 128–33; Reinhold Kaiser, *Trunkenheit und Gewalt im Mittelalter* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2002), 160–80, et passim, discusses the same phenomenon, i.e., the correlation of alcoholism and violence, in the early and high Middle Ages.

pregnant wife at first pleads with him to call off the arrangements as she is firmly intent on living in her own house until her death. But he does not pay any attention to her requests, so bitter quarrels and fighting between husband and wife erupt and go on for days. Apparently, as the narrative indicates, although the marriage was imbalanced in terms of decision-making power in favor of the husband, the wife does not allow him to impose his will on her without raising considerable opposition, resulting in severe arguments when she feels that her own existence is threatened. All servants and the neighbors observe the growing struggle between the couple, but no one dares to intervene. Worse even, the loud noise tells them that the husband is beating his wife: "hat jederman gemeinet / der würt schlahe sein weib" (111; everybody assumed that he was beating his wife). When a male servant cannot sleep late at night because of the fighting that is going on above his head and calls out to his master, inquiring whether he needs any help, the latter sends him back to his room, flatly stating that nobody is threatening him, whereas he was "just" beating his wife a little: "'Ich hab mein weib ein wenig geschlagen'" (111; I have beaten my wife a little). This explanation seems to satisfy the servant, who then returns to his bed, but the next morning both husband and wife are dead. Subsequent investigations reveal that the innkeeper murdered his wife and then committed suicide, which is allegedly proven by the evil smell coming from his exhumed corpse, whereas his wife's corpse does not release such hellish odors. Once the authorities have reached this conclusion, they remove his corpse from the cemetery as an act of public excommunication, whereas his wife's body is reinterred in holy ground because she and her fetus were innocent victims (112).

Obviously, as the narrative's conclusion indicates, here we have a literary case in which domestic violence is explicitly condemned, although the historical reality seems to indicate that violence against women in the Middle Ages and in the following centuries was widespread and generally accepted as the privilege of husbands. This raises the question why Wickram, and many other poets before and after him, highlighted this phenomenon and described it in rather negative terms.¹⁴ Howard R. Bloch and Danielle Régner-Bohler, focusing on high-medieval literature, argue that "courtly poetry's description of aristocratic wives held incommunicado behind their husband's castle walls reflected the reality of arranged marriages."¹⁵ In many cases, probably most of the cases of domestic

¹⁴ Elisabeth Wäghäll Nivre, *Women and Family Life in Early Modern German Literature*, does not do enough justice to this tale. After stating the obvious that the husband had committed murder, she proceeds to comment on the narrator only in light of her broad discussion of gender issues: "He thus emphasizes the role of the woman as a respected authority within the household" (38).

¹⁵ Summarizing Bloch's and Régner-Bohler's parallel theses, John M. Klassen, *The Letters of the Rožmberk Sisters: Noblewomen in Fifteenth-Century Bohemia*, transl. from Czech and German with introduction, notes and interpretive essay, with Eva Doležalová and Lynn Szabo. Library of

violence were never recorded because they belonged to the ordinary situation at home. Consequently, wife-beating (battering) was normally not met with any particular public criticism, though it would be dangerous to assume that husbands in general enjoyed absolute power over their wives and could punish them at will or beat them up for no special reasons. Wickram's highly popular tale, and many other literary accounts, indicate significant opposition to this physical abuse and force us to approach this issue with much more sensitivity and discrimination.

Wickram does not offer any apologies for violent behavior; instead he provides explanations of its common causes and, by the same token, offers defensive measures against its spreading. Interestingly, legal history knows of many cases where women actually had access to the courts and could fight against battery at the hand of their husbands and other male relatives, though we would not find any consistent and uniform system supporting women's causes within a patriarchal world.¹⁶

One of the most interesting and complex examples of domestic violence in Wickram's *Rollwagenbüchlein* proves to be No. 44 "Einer vertreib seinem alten Weib das Hauptwee" (82–84), where a young mercenary marries an old but rich widow and soon begins to return to his previous, rather excessive lifestyle, partying with his former companions, drinking and gambling until late at night. When his wife once pretends to suffer from severe headaches so as to make him send away all his friends, he starts beating her head violently, acting as if he were trying to protect her from a hostile body part (84). This forces her to accept her husband and his vices without any further opposition, but in the course of time when she no longer criticizes him, he partly refrains from his debaucheries voluntarily. Here domestic violence is directed against an overly critical elder wife, but the narrator seems to accept her mistreatment as justified because of her excessive attempts at controlling her husband.¹⁷ Ultimately, however, the couple

Medieval Women (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 116–17, continues, "Women's voices of lament and rage never penetrated beyond those ramparts and never received an answer." Though certainly correct in some respect, such a somber picture of married women's miserable lives is not only contradicted by Klassen's own work on Perchta and her sister Aněžka, but certainly draws on traditional, almost romantic notions of the so-called "dark ages" when almost anything terrible was possible for women. See also Julie Hardwick, *The Practice of Patriarchy. Gender and the Politics of Household Authority in Early Modern France* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 102.

¹⁶ Patricia R. Orr, "Non Potest Appellum Facere: Criminal Charges Women Could Not—But Did—Bring in Thirteenth-Century English Royal Courts of Justice," *The Final Argument: The Imprint of Violence on Society in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Donald J. Kagay and L. J. Andrew Villalon (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), 141–60; Susanna Burghartz, *Zeiten der Reinheit*, 128–30, demonstrates that Basel women had considerable access to the courts where they filed charges against their husbands at least well into the late 1530s, but then their legal status declined because of the impact of the Protestant Reformation.

¹⁷ Joy Wiltenburg, "Family Murders: Gender, Reproduction, and the Discourse of Crime in Early

finds a compromise and accepts each other in a mostly peaceful manner because, as Elisabeth Wåghäll Nivre observes, "Domination by violence is in itself no solution to marital problems in his [Wickram's] texts."¹⁸

Even though Wickram's life span falls squarely into the age of the Reformation,¹⁹ his short prose narratives, which derive their basic material both from personal experiences and oral traditions, illustrate the profound interest in social, erotic, ethical, moral, and political issues pertaining to the urban community in the sixteenth and in earlier centuries as well.²⁰ In other words, in his case we come across solid evidence that sixteenth-century authors were not entirely enthralled by religious themes and the conflicts between the two major religions. Admittedly, the notion of 'domestic violence' was not yet clearly developed in the Middle Ages and the early modern age, and has gained respect as a heuristic and pragmatic tool only in the last twenty to thirty years of the twentieth century as a consequence of feminists fighting for women's rights.²¹ This, however, should not prevent us from applying the theoretical discussions of 'domestic violence' to the gender relations in earlier times. On the contrary, as I will argue on the basis of a critical reading of a wide range of literary examples, the application of this modern concept for the interpretation of medieval texts reveals new levels of

Modern Germany," *Colloquia Germanica* 28, 3–4 (1995): 357–74; Elisabeth Wåghäll, *Dargestellte Welt–Reale Welt: Freundschaft, Liebe und Familie in den Prosawerken Georg Wickrams* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1996), 218–66, studies the role of marriage in Wickram's major texts, but she does not examine his *Rollwagenbüchlein*.

¹⁸ Elisabeth Wåghäll Nivre, *Women and Family Life in Early Modern German Literature*, 2004, 37. She adds the pertinent observation: "The marriage can thus be saved, but it seems to be a forced agreement."

¹⁹ Albrecht Classen, "Late Middle High German, Renaissance, and Reformation," *A Concise History of German Literature to 1900*, ed. by Kim Vivian. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1992), 58–90, 316–17; here 85–86.

²⁰ Jan Knopf, *Frühzeit des Bürgers. Erfahrene und verleugnerte Realität in den Romanen Wickrams, Grimmelschhausens, Schnabels* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1978), 49, points out that Wickram presents a world far removed from the mythical *ordo* characterizing the Middle Ages and clearly defined by a strong sense of realism.

²¹ Adam Jukes, *Why Men Hate Women* (London: Free Association Books, 1993); *Gender and Crime*, ed. Emerson R. Dobash Russell Dobash, and L. Noakes (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995); Henrietta Moore, "The Problem of Explaining Violence in the Social Sciences," *Sex and Violence: Issues in Representation and Experience*, ed. Penelope Harvey and Peter Gold (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 138–55; *The Domestic Violence Sourcebook: [everything you need to know]*, ed. Dawn Bradley Berry, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Lowell House, 2000); *Domestic Violence: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Tamara L. Roleff (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2000); Sana Loue, *Intimate Partner Violence: Societal, Medical, Legal, and Individual Responses*. Issues in Women's Health (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2001); Lundy Bancroft, *Why does he do that?: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 2002); *Handbook of Violence*, ed. Lisa A. Rapp-Paglicci, Albert R. Roberts; John S. Wodarski (New York: Wiley, 2002).

meaning and sheds significant light on specific messages which the authors addressed to their audiences.

As recent scholars have defined 'domestic violence,' and wife (or husband) battering, it is "limited neither to physical harm nor to a particular kind of behavior or action. Rather, it takes a variety of forms—social, psychological, economic, spiritual, verbal, and sexual—all of which are intended to injure another person in some way." This injury or violence also includes "an offender's controlling behaviors—preventing access to friends and family, making accusations of infidelity sometimes accompanied by jealous rage, controlling all household financial resources, prohibiting outside work, charging incompetence or insanity . . . as well as imposing any kind of sexual conduct without consent . . ." ²² As Sylvia Robertson observes, "[d]omestic violence occurs in all socioeconomic and racial groups. Its victims may be of any age or sex. . . . Domestic violence has been condoned historically because it has taken place in the sacred confines of the family. It has been protected by the right of privacy, but abuse impinges on the community-at-large."²³

Whereas wife-beating and other kinds of physical abuse were often considered to be within the purview of husbands throughout the Middle Ages and far into modern times,²⁴ more severe forms of violence were clearly rejected even by the male authorities and treated as criminal; when murder was involved, the husband was executed.²⁵ We could observe this phenomenon in the case of some of Wickram's tales. The notion of the husband as *pater familiae*, however, endowed with the *patria potestas*, well established by the Biblical account and the teachings of the Church Fathers,²⁶ exerted a strong hold over the entire medieval society and far beyond, which implied that "domestic violence" in the modern sense of the word was not considered to be "violence" as such, especially if it served as punishment for breaking the rules or for having caused any kind of damage to the

²² *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, ed. Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin, and Merrall Llewelyn Price (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 2002), 2–3.

²³ Sylvia Robertson, "Domestic Violence," *Women's Studies Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1: *Views from the Sciences*, ed. by Helen Tierney (New York, Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1989), 107–09; here 107.

²⁴ Wilfried Hartmann, "Frauen im Recht und vor Gericht im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert," *Geschlecht, Magie und Hexenverfolgung*, ed. Ingrid Ahrendt-Schulte. *Hexenforschung*, 7 (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2002), 105–121; Eva Parra Membrives, *Mundos femeninos emancipados. Reconstrucción teórica-empírica de una propuesta literaria femenina en la Edad Media alemana*. *Textos de Filología*, 5 (Zaragoza: Anubar, 1998), 56–62.

²⁵ Margaret H. Kerr, "Husband and Wife in Criminal Proceedings in Medieval England," *Women, Marriage, and Family in Medieval Christendom. Essays in Memory of Michael M. Sheehan, C.S.B.*, ed. by Constance M. Rousseau and Joel T. Rosenthal. *Studies in Medieval Culture*, XXXVII (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998), 211–42; here 216–18.

²⁶ Edith Ennen, *Frauen im Mittelalter*. 3rd rev. ed. (1984; Munich: Beck, 1987), 44–48.

family and its property. Corporeal punishments of the wife and children were considered natural privileges of the father figure who acted as the king's and ultimately as God's proxy within the small family unit.²⁷ The law of Barrèges valley stipulated in 1404: "Every master and head of a household may chastise his wife and family without anyone placing any impediment in his way."²⁸ Only when the husband had no reason and could not explain why he felt compelled to mete out physical punishment was he considered a perpetrator who deserved to be punished in turn. In Béarn, for instance, when the husband killed his pregnant wife, "he was considered a murderer."²⁹ Of course, this did not necessarily mean that the authorities were trying to protect women in the first place; instead they wanted to control violence and fight criminality.

As thirteenth-century Italian documents illustrate – probably representative of most of medieval society – the husband/father was given the right of the absolute ruler within the family, that is, he was the *paterfamilias*. As communal statutes often confirmed, the fathers were authorized "to punish their children, their younger brothers, and also their wives."³⁰ This situation applied – *mutatis mutandis* – to almost all of medieval and early-modern Europe, as far as the official documents allow us to deduce. On the other hand, despite the rather difficult legal situation for women during the Middle Ages, many literary documents reflect a surprisingly high level of awareness about domestic violence and addressed it in a strongly critical fashion. Although many women submitted to their husbands without questioning their patriarchal authority, we also come across many examples of bitter conflicts and women's successful struggle to maintain their own position within the marriage, especially when the husband proved to be weak, foolish, or brutal.

In other words, "domestic violence" was not simply a matter of everyday life and accepted as an unchangeable and unavoidable fact for wives and children, if

²⁷ Lawrence Stone, "Interpersonal Violence in English Society 1300–1800," *Past and Present* 101 (1983): 22–33; Philippa Maddern, *Violence and Social Order: East Anglia, 1422–1442* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), chapter 2; Barbara Becker-Cantarino, *Der lange Weg zur Mündigkeit. Frau und Literatur (1500–1800)* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987), 19–26; for fathers' privilege and duty to punish children who were guilty of a transgression, see Joëlle Fuhrmann, *Theorie und Praxis in der Gesetzgebung des Spätmittelalters in Deutschland am Beispiel der Ingelheimer Schöffensprüche* (Bern, Frankfurt, et al.: Peter Lang, 2001), 145–51; she also discusses many other legal aspects regarding the relationship between husband and wife, but does not examine 'domestic violence.'

²⁸ Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Families in Former Times. Kinship, Household, and Sexuality*. Transl. by Richard Southern. Themes in the Social Sciences (1976; Cambridge, London, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 123.

²⁹ Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 124; but he also raises the open-ended question: "But what was the position when the dead woman had not been pregnant?"

³⁰ Charles de La Roncière, "Tuscan Notables on the Eve of the Renaissance," *Revelations of the Medieval World*, ed. Georges Duby. A History of Private Life, II (Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988), 157–310; here 207.

we can believe the fictional accounts as reflections of historical conditions. Moreover, many well-documented women, such as Monna Margherita, wife of Francesco di Marco Datini, a merchant of Prato, or Margareta of Schwangau, wife of the South Tyrolean nobleman and poet Oswald von Wolkenstein, stood up to their husbands and made valiant, often successful efforts to stop their physical abuse.³¹ The same applies to the many cases of rape which were, albeit they happened often, vehemently condemned by the public and the authorities and severely persecuted.³² Studying specific law cases involving crimes against women, Walter Prevenier reaches the noteworthy conclusion that "the affective sensitivity of medieval man was not as low as is usually claimed, even concerning violence. Despite the tendency to trivialize violent deeds both great and small, violent behavior did carry both a distinct social stigma and the threat of judicial sanction in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries."³³ Prevenier, however, examines violence against women outside of the family, primarily rape, whereas our focus here rests on domestic violence as reflected in literary documents, an issue much harder to come to terms with both in the Middle Ages and today.³⁴

III. Christine de Pizan

To continue with the chronological sequence with which I have begun this study, let us slowly work our way backwards from the late to the high Middle Ages and investigate specific literary examples offering critical voices directed against the phenomenon of domestic violence.³⁵ As it will become clear throughout our

³¹ Oswald von Wolkenstein reflects upon his fear of his wife who threatens to beat him up when he is abusing their children, *Die Lieder Oswalds von Wolkenstein*. Unter Mitwirkung von Walter Weiß und Notburga Wolf herausgegeben von Karl Kurt Klein. Musikanhang von Walter Salmen. 3rd ed. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 55 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987), no. 44, vv. 50–58; Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato: Francesco di Marco Datini, 1335–1410* (New York: A. Knopf, 1957).

³² *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose. *The New Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001); a particularly gruesome rape scene can be found in Heinrich von dem Türlin's *Diu Crône* (ca. 1220, that is, contemporary to *Die Winsbeckin*). *The Crown. A Tale of Sir Gawain and King Arthur's Court* by Heinrich von dem Türlin, transl. and with an introduction by J. W. Thomas (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), vv. 11411–792, pp. 130–32.

³³ Walter Prevenier, "Violence Against Women in a Medieval Metropolis: Paris Around 1400," *Law, Custom, and the Social Fabric in Medieval Europe. Essays in Honor of Bryce Lyon*, ed., with an Appreciation, by Bernard S. Bachrach and David Nicholas. *Studies in Medieval Culture*, XXVIII (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990), 263–84; here 266.

³⁴ *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, ed. Salisbury, Donavin, and Price, "Introduction," 4–5.

³⁵ The contributions to *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts* are almost exclusively focused on Middle English, except for Marilyn Migiel's article on Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Christopher G. Nugent's

subsequent analysis, both male and female writers explicitly addressed this issue and voiced considerable concern about this kind of physical and psychological abuse. Of course, it depends very much on the selection of individual narratives, as one can always find examples of medieval tales where wife-beating appears as 'natural' and 'normal,' perhaps even desirable to suppress the woman's alleged independent mind-set and attitude of obstructionism.

"Boccaccio," for example, as Robert J. Clements and Joseph Gibaldi emphasize, "clearly shows us the contemporary notion that a woman's 'natural' condition was complete subjugation to men. . . Solomon indirectly counsels Giosefo that the only way to treat a woman is to beat her like a donkey, a corrective which Giosefo uses successfully on his wife."³⁶ But if we turn toward novellas composed by women authors, such as Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549) and María de Zayas y Sotomayor (ca. 1590–ca. 1661), often highly critical opinions against domestic violence, and especially against rape, are voiced.³⁷ Nevertheless, awareness of domestic violence was not, as we have seen above, limited to female writers. It would be a worthwhile enterprise also to look into the relevant law books, such as the thirteenth-century *Sachsenspiegel*, the *Deutschenspiegel* (ca. 1265–1275), the *Schwabenspiegel* (1275), and the like for relevant statements regarding domestic violence,³⁸ but here I will limit myself to literary and didactic texts.

Whereas Jörg Wickram tried to teach by literary examples, more than hundred years before him the famous French writer Christine de Pizan composed a conduct book for young women and provided them with a wide range of practical advice how to maintain a good marriage, how to run an estate, how to communicate with

study on the Old Welsh *Prwyll Pendewic Dyuet*. In addition, Anna Roberts examines some Old French historical fictions such as *Roman de Thèbes*, and Robert Stanton discusses the *Life of Christina of Markyate*.

³⁶ Robert J. Clements and Joseph Gibaldi, *Anatomy of the Novella. The European Tale Collection from Boccaccio and Chaucer to Cervantes*. The Gotham Library of the New York University Press (New York: New York University Press, 1977), 166.

³⁷ Clements and Gibaldi, *Anatomy of the Novella*, 169, suggest the opposite: "Expressions of sympathy for the woman's lot are rare in the tradition before the sixteenth century." Interestingly, however, they have consulted only English, French, Italian, and Spanish sources.

³⁸ *The Saxon Mirror. A Sachsenspiegel of the Fourteenth Century*, transl. Maria Dobozy. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); she does not include any references to 'wife-beating,' 'domestic violence,' 'cruelty,' or 'brutality.' In an e-mail message, dated Febr. 20, 2003, Prof. Dobozy answered my inquiry as follows: "I don't really know of any references that could be construed as "domestic violence" in any of the Sachsen- Schwabenspiegel versions. The only two things that come to mind: 1. guardians taken to court for embezzling their ward's inheritance (that probably does not include father, but maybe a brother); 2. all those living beings (incl. babies and animals) that witness the rape of a woman are to be slain. This probably was a remnant of some very old ritual slaying, but if there was any possibility of it being carried out, I don't know. If there was, then the woman would certainly be deterred from ever admitting to rape. So basically I know of no such instances."

the relatives, servants, and subjects, how to raise her children, and so forth: *Le Livre du Trésor de la Cité des Dames* (*The Treasure of the City of Ladies* (1405)).³⁹ As to the relationship with husbands, Christine makes the important observation that “there are some husbands who behave very distantly towards their wives and give no sign of love, or very little (63; “il en est de telz qui se portent vers elles tres felonnesment et sans signe de nulle amour,” 54). Worse, however, some display “extremely perverse and rude behaviour” (64; “pervers, rude, mal amoureux vers sa femme,” 55) and some even commit adultery (64; 55). In this situation, Christine recommends that the wife should pretend “that she does not notice it and that she truly does not know anything about it” (64; “dissimuler saignement sans fair semblant que elle s’en aperçoive et que elle n’en scet riens,” 55). A prudent woman would realize the danger that she might lose her husband if she were to criticize him for his behavior, which would bring her more shame and dishonor than if she had kept quiet about his affair.

As an alternative, Christine suggests that the wife should try to talk with her husband in a pleasant and kind manner, but she should maintain her friendly and submissive attitude, trying to gain support from “good people and her confessor” who could talk to him (64; “bonnes gens et par son confesseur,” 55). A courtly lady ought to reject all gossip and ignore evil-minded reports about her husband’s adultery. If, however, all her efforts to regain her husband’s favor would be for nought, “she will take refuge in God,” hoping that eventually he would come to his senses, as “such a perverse man will feel remorse only late in life” (64; “son reffuge sera a Dieu . . . que ja l’omme si pervers ne sera que conscience et raison ne lui die,” 55–56). Relying on the effect of time alone, Christine expresses hope that the lady “will have won her cause through steadfastly enduring” (64; “et ainsi aura sa cause gaingnee par bien souffrir,” 56). All her honor depends on her ability to demonstrate her strong, loyal, and unwavering love, irrespective of his behavior toward her. “Prudence will teach her that no greater honour can be said of a lady or any woman than that she is true and loyal to her husband, and that she clearly shows that she loves him and consequently is loyal to him . . . She cannot give any proof of her loyalty except by the love that she shows him and the external signs by which thoughts and emotions are commonly judged” (65; “E lui apprendra Prudence que plus grant honneur ne puet estre dit de dame et de toute femme que dire que elle soit vray et loyalle vers son seigneur et que bien fait semblant que elle l’aime, et par consequent luy est loyale . . . si ne puet fair autre

³⁹ Christine de Pisan [sic], *The Treasure of the City of Ladies or The Book of the Three Virtues*. Transl. with an Introduction by Sarah Lawson (London: Penguin, 1985), 21. For a critical edition, see Christine de Pisan [sic], *Le livre des trois vertus*, ed. critique. Introduction et notes par Charity Cannon Willard. Texte établi en collaboration avec Eric Hicks. Bibliothèque du Quinzième Siècle, L (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1989).

certificacion de sa loyaulté fors par l'amour que elle lui monstre et les signes de par dehors par lesquelz on juge communement du courage," 56–57).

Christine's teaching might not be appealing to modern readers at all, especially within the context of domestic violence which she clearly recognizes as a fact of life in late-medieval France and yet as a significant threat to the well-being of a princess, or other women of any social class. But except for friendly pleading with her husband, ignoring his wrong-doing, keeping up with a pretense as if nothing has happened, and praying to God asking Him for help, Christine does not seem to know of any particular remedy, except that time will heal all wounds. Considering, however, the generally limited legal means available to women in the Middle Ages, it would be anachronistic to expect any radical solutions for the collapse of the marriage bonds through the eruption of domestic violence. At least Christine is realistic enough to acknowledge that "many quarrels do indeed come in marriage because of false reports of deceivers to husbands, because many women cannot pretend to ignore certain things, or do not know how to do it well" (71; "car mains contens viennent en mariage par faulx rapors et flateurs ausquelz maintes ne scevent pas bien ou ne peuent dissimuler," 65). Admittedly, Christine addresses only women and does not investigate the reason for men to behave as they do (63; 54), but she emphasizes in turn more than anything else women's need for a demure comportment: "women should restrain themselves with seemly conduct among knights and squires and all men. They should speak demurely and sweetly and . . . divert and enjoy themselves decorously and without wantonness" (75; "se contiennent entre chevaliers et escuiers et tous hommes par beau maintien, dient leurs paroles simplement et coyement, et s'esbatent et solacent . . . gracieusement et sans lubrece," 72–73). If, however, a wife is badly treated by an ill-tempered husband, if he holds back all money from the princess, and if he guards her so closely as to take away all her freedom—according to the modern definition this would be a clear case of 'domestic violence'—Christine plainly declines to offer any advice, except "to endure patiently, always to do good so far as it is in [her] power, and to obey in order to have peace" (80; "ne mais prendre en patience et faire tousjours bien a leur pouoir, et obeir pour avoir paix," 81).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Marilynn Desmond, *Ovid's Art and the Wife of Bath: The Ethics of Erotic Violence* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 162–64; she emphasizes: "Unlike Chaucer's reiteration of Ovidian erotics in the *Wife of Bath's* Prologue, Christine develops a critical discourse and even a critical subjectivity. The argumentative and adversarial rhetoric of the *ars dictaminis*—its rhetorical violence—offered her a subject position from which she could develop a language of female embodiment as a form of authority" (164). Whereas Desmond suggests throughout her book that medieval authors identified marital violence with sexual eroticism—which explains the curious phrase "rhetorical violence"—here she reaches a quite different perspective that seems to undermine her overall argument.

Considering the vigorousness with which Christine herself had stood up and fought for women's freedom, independence, and learning in her famous *City of Ladies* (1404), this advice of submissiveness seems surprising. But even there, Christine had clearly stated the long-held view derived from biblical teaching: "men are masters over their wives, and not the wives mistresses over their husbands, who would never allow their wives to have such authority."⁴¹ Nevertheless, not even here does Christine consign herself to this condition, instead she also emphasizes that there are bad husbands who greatly mistreat their wives (194). This criticism is paired with the praise of good husbands, such as the one Christine herself had been married to, and with the criticism of evil wives, whom she detests and disregards as "creatures alienated from their own nature" (194).

This testimony finds an interesting parallel in the comments by the fifteenth-century Italian friar, Cherubino da Siena, in his *Regole della vita matrimoniale* where we learn the following teaching for husbands:

When you see your wife commit an offense, do not rush at her with insults and violent blows: rather, first correct the wrong lovingly and pleasantly, and sweetly teach her not to do it again so as not to offend God, injure her soul, or bring shame upon herself or you . . . But if your wife is of a servile disposition and has a crude and shifty spirit so that pleasant words have no effect, scold her sharply, bully and terrify her. And if this still does not work, take up a stick and beat her soundly, for it is better to punish the body and correct the soul than to damage the soul and spare the body.⁴²

Late-medieval verse novellas reveal a surprising panorama of concrete examples of how the genders interacted with each other. Consequently, a close examination of some of these novellas quickly reveal a stupendous amount of cases involving domestic violence, whether the wife or the husband turns out to be the victim.⁴³ Two preliminary observations help us both to connect these novellas with the tales in Wickram's *Rollwagenbüchlein* and with the question concerning domestic violence: 1. many authors explicitly dealt with domestic violence, 2. many of them severely criticized the physical abuse of the marital partner and expressed strong opposition to violent behavior.

⁴¹ Quoted from *The Writings of Christine de Pizan*. Selected and ed. by Charity Cannon Willard (New York: Persea Books, 1994), 194.

⁴² Quoted from *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, ed. Salisbury, Donovin, and Price, 7.

⁴³ In fact, as both historical and literary documents indicate, 'domestic violence' has never been fully limited to husbands' ill treatment of their wives, though the majority of cases involving battering concern male violence. For a balanced viewpoint, see Julius R. Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 35–40.

IV. Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken

In the contemporary chapbook *Königin Sibille* by Countess Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken (ca. 13495–1456) we find an impressive example to confirm our observations. This text is extant in this early-modern German (Elisabeth's) and in an Old Spanish and an Old French version (anonymous), and each of them addresses the issue of violence in most drastic terms. Most interestingly, we quickly realize that domestic violence is not class specific; in fact, the opposite is the case as the queen is exposed to the deadly accusation of adultery because a dwarf had secretly slipped into Emperor Charlemagne's bed while the latter attended church service. He hoped that he could make love with the queen during her husband's absence, though the circumstances directly point to rape. He had asked her before to allow him to make love with her, for which she had punished him with hitting his face so hard that he lost three teeth (121). Undaunted by her harsh rejection, he now seeks his revenge and wants to destroy her honor, even if he himself would have to die (122). At the critical moment, Sibille is deeply asleep and does not notice him until her husband returns from mass and discovers, to his great horror, the naked dwarf next to his wife. Because of his unbridled jealousy and infinite fear of all male competitors, including even this ugly dwarf, the Emperor immediately believes that his wife, like all women since Eve's time, has cheated on him ("Got wolle yme verfluchen / der vmmer me frouwen getrűwet / dan die frouwe hat mich betrogen," 122; May God curse the man who ever trusts women as my wife has cheated on me).⁴⁴ Charlemagne even wants Sibille to die at the stake, although she implores him to believe his own wife's oath, especially as she is pregnant with his first child. Yet Charlemagne's wrath is so severe that no reasonable words can reach him, and he only allows his wife to leave the court and to return home to her father, the Emperor of Constantinople, instead of killing her (126–27).⁴⁵ Ultimately, the conflict between husband and wife proves to be a proxy war for a much more far-reaching power struggle in which one group of

⁴⁴ Ute von Bloh, *Ausgerenkte Ordnung. Vier Prosaepen aus dem Umkreis der Gräfin Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken: 'Herzog Herpin', 'Loher und Maller', 'Huge Scheppel', 'Königin Sibille'*. Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 119 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002), 224–33.

⁴⁵ *Der Roman von der Königin Sibille: in drei Prosafassungen des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Fritz Burg and Hermann Tiemann. Veröffentlichungen aus der Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg, 10 (Hamburg: Hauswedel, 1977); Albrecht Classen, "Women in 15th-Century Literature: Protagonists (Melusine), Poets (Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken), and Patrons (Mechthild von Österreich)," *"Der Buchstab tůdt – der Geist macht lebendig"*. Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Hans-Gert Roloff, ed. James Hardin and Jörg Jungmayr. Vol. I (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Lang, 1992), 431–58. See also *Der Roman von der Königin Sibille. Lemmatisierter Wortindex*, bearbeitet von Robert R. Anderson, Ulrich Goebel, Oskar Reichmann, Dieter Wolf. Indices Verborum zum altdeutschen Schrifttum, VIII (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1981).

courtiers is determined to destroy Charlemagne's kingship and happily utilizes the queen as the weak link in his line of defense. Sibille survives, however, because another group of courtiers, loyally defending Charlemagne, comes to her rescue, knowing too well that their ruler would not be able to continue with his family line without a queen and hence without an heir, the soon to be born, Ludwig.⁴⁶

Elisabeth's prose novel follows Queen Sibille's and her son's struggles and suffering over many years until finally Charlemagne is forced to recognize her innocence, then admits his earlier misjudgment, and welcomes his wife back at his court as his loyal and much appreciated wife. However, it takes enormous military pressure, the dedication of those members of the court council who loyally serve the Emperor, the appeal of the Pope, and of Sibille's father, the Emperor of Constantinople, to sway Charlemagne in his bitter and brutal distrust of his wife. The twelve knights who make up the council explicitly address the fundamental problem: "Jr ist gewalt vnd v[n]recht gescheen / als ir wol horttent von Markiren dem verreder" (172; she suffered from violence and injustice, as you heard from the confession given by the traitor Markir). Subsequently, Sibille repeats the same complaint: "mir ist gewalt vnd vnrecht geschehen" (172). Obviously, despite the happy end, Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken unmistakably formulates strong criticism against the husband's harsh and cruel treatment of his wife and sets a literary example for her audience warning them against the devastating consequences of domestic violence resulting from jealousy and preconceived notions about women's nature, i.e., deep-seated misogyny.

The queen's life proves to be an extremely harsh existence filled with enormous suffering because of the dwarf's evil-mindedness and Charlemagne's extreme insecurity and mistrust of women. The female author explicitly evokes our sympathy for the suffering of the female protagonist which results from her exorbitantly unfair treatment at the hand of the own irrational, volatile, and violent husband.⁴⁷ Most scholarship has focused on the weak, corruptible, and highly questionable character of Charlemagne, and studied the literary projection of genealogical concepts developed by Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken,⁴⁸ and

⁴⁶ Wolfgang Liepe, *Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken. Entstehung und Anfänge des Prosaromans in Deutschland* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1920), 176–79, examines the broad literary-historical background of Sibille's suffering, but has nothing to say about the actual violence done against the queen. For the relevant literary source material, see Elfriede Moser-Rath, "Frau," *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, ed. Rolf Wilhelm Brednich. Vol. 5 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1987), 100–37; here 113–15.

⁴⁷ Albrecht Classen, "Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken," *German Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation, 1280–1580*, ed. by James Hardin and Max Reinhart. Dictionary of Literary Biography, 179 (Detroit, Washington, DC, and London: Gale Research, 1997), 42–47.

⁴⁸ Ulrike Gaebel, *Chansons de geste in Deutschland. Tradition und Destruktion in Elisabeths von Nassau-Saarbrücken Prosaadaptationen*. Ph.D. dissertation, Freie Universität Berlin, http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/2002/8/gaebel_diss_023.pdf (last accessed on Feb. 23, 2007), 260–61.

has also focused on Sibille's constant exposure to male sexual desire.⁴⁹ Here we can add the significant observation that the poet vehemently and explicitly charged the male ruler for a crime which we today would call "domestic violence," as the author's focus indeed rests on Sibille's almost endless suffering at the hand of her male surroundings. Moreover, Charlemagne proves to be a victim of deep-seated fears of male competitors who might seduce his wife right under his nose, especially as he needs very little conviction of his wife's moral weakness and tends to believe rather questionable testimony by the dwarf instead of critically investigating the actual conditions because he does not acknowledge the young queen as an equal partner. His patriarchal perspectives blind him utterly to the reality of his marriage and make him to a victim of traditional misogyny, which the dwarf and the hostile courtiers skillfully utilize for their own end.

The narrator's criticism does not only aim at the king's intellectual weakness in handling his own marriage, but also at his tendency to resort to violence instead of examining all charges against his wife in a rational and critical manner.⁵⁰ He hits first, so to speak, before he allows reason its proper place. As *Königin Sibille* illustrates only too vividly, the men in power constantly engage in violent struggle against each other for political dominance, whereby the female protagonist becomes an easy victim for their numerous and nefarious machinations.

V. Heinrich Kaufringer

Domestic violence, however, could also affect husbands, as we learn in a number of late-medieval verse novellas. Heinrich Kaufringer, a Landsberg citizen who worked as a *custos*, or sacristan, between 1369 and 1404, explored this topic in his tale "Drei listige Frauen" (Three Cunning Wives).⁵¹ This he based on an anonymous account of "Drei buhlerische Frauen" from ca. 1300, which was also retold by several other contemporary authors, such as the famous Nuremberg poet Hans Folz.

⁴⁹ Ute von Bloh, *Ausgerenkte Ordnung*, 118–20.

⁵⁰ von Bloh, *Ausgerenkte Ordnung*, 292–93.

⁵¹ Quoted from *Novellistik des Mittelalters*. For biographical, textual, and interpretive comments, see Grubmüller's annotations, 1269–70, 1291–1300; for further information on Kaufringer and his social-literary position, see Marga Stede, *Schreiben in der Krise. Die Texte des Heinrich Kaufringer. Literatur – Imagination – Realität*, 5 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1993), 219–37; see also Albrecht Classen, "Love, Marriage, and Sexual Transgressions in Heinrich Kaufringer's Verse Narratives (ca. 1400)," *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. id. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 278 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 289–312.

Three peasant women decide to enter a wager regarding who of them would be able to deceive her husband in the most grotesque way. The first one, Hildegard, pretends to have fallen sick because of the stench coming from a rotting tooth in her husband's mouth. The farmhand, who had been the wife's secret lover, assists in the subsequent operation and pulls out one of the peasant's teeth, but the wife laments that it was the wrong one. The poor man has to suffer a second time and almost faints from the pain, which allows Hildegard to treat him as if he had actually died. In his ignorance the peasant accepts her entire performance as perfect truth, especially because the village priest has given him the extreme unction. In his utter ignorance he believes everything what his wife pretends, and when he observes with his own eyes that the farmhand and his wife make love right in front of him, he only calls out that he would have taken harsh measurement against their adultery if he still were among the living.

The second woman, Jutta, secretly cuts off her husband's hair and later acts as if he were indeed the village priest Heinrich. At first he resists accepting this role as he is entirely lacking in learnedness and does not even know how to read. His bald head, however, convinces him that he in fact must be the priest, and so he allows her to dress him in the priest's vestments. The third woman, Mechthild, hides all of her husband's clothing and pretends that he is fully dressed when they wake up in the morning and want to attend the church service. Despite his protests she forces him to go naked, making him fully believe the illusion. During the service, however, when he wants to get some money out of his purse, he feels his testicles and tries to open them in vain. Mechthild then takes a knife, pretending to help him in opening the string, and cuts off his testicles. The intensive pain drives him crazy, and when he runs out of the church, the two other peasants follow him. Kaufringer concludes his narrative tongue-in-cheek with the question who of the three women actually won the wager. The person who would come up with the right answer would be most intelligent (555), whereas the badly mistreated peasants are the butt of the grotesque joke.

The domestic violence presented here is directly related to long-standing misogyny and does not fall into the same category as the perpetration dealt with in the previous narrative accounts, especially because the innocent victims do not gain our sympathy.⁵² On the contrary, Kaufringer demonstrates his thorough contempt of the peasants, once again a reflection of an old tradition of peasant satire mostly projected by poets representative of aristocratic and urban interest.⁵³

⁵² Stede, *Schreiben in der Krise*, 94.

⁵³ Hilde Hügli, *Der deutsche Bauer im Mittelalter: dargestellt nach den deutschen literarischen Quellen vom 11.–15. Jahrhundert*. Sprache und Dichtung, 42 (1929; Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1970); *Landherr, Bauer, Ackerknecht: der Bauer im Mittelalter: Klischee und Wirklichkeit*, ed. Karl Brunner and Gerhard Jaritz (Vienna: H. Böhlau Nachf., 1985); Albrecht Classen, "Der Bauer in der Lyrik Oswalds von Wolkenstein," *Euphorion* 82, 2 (1988): 150–167.

Irrespective of these limitations, the narratives still indicate the degree to which violence could also be exerted by women against their husbands, here leading to a radical perversion of traditional gender roles and a dissolution of the village structure.⁵⁴

VI. Boccaccio

Similar elements can also be observed in Chaucer's famous *Wife of Bath's Tale* where the Wife's prologue and her tale signal the chaotic consequences within the medieval family if both marriage partners competed for the absolute position of the *paterfamilias* and relied on contradictory text traditions for their authority.⁵⁵ Violence against the marriage partner, however, whether the result of actions and words by the husband or by the wife, is strictly condemned both by Chaucer and Kaufringer, among many contemporary writers.⁵⁶

Not surprisingly, we also find noteworthy references to domestic violence in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, such as in the very first tale of the first day when the deceitful and completely immoral Ser Ciappelletto⁵⁷ falsely confesses to a friar all his alleged sins, which turn out to be apparent signs of his saintliness: "For once there was a neighbour of mine that for no reason in the world did nothing but beat his wife, and once I spoke ill of him to the wife's relatives, so much did I pity the poor wretched little woman, whom he tanned, as God be witness, whenever he had drunk too much" ("un mio vicino che, al maggior torto del mondo, non faceva altro che batter la moglie, sì che io dissi una volta male di lui alli parenti della moglie, sì gran pietà mi venne di quella cattivella, la quale egli, ogni volta che bevuto avea troppo, conciaua come Dio vel dica").⁵⁸ Irrespective of the fact that he

⁵⁴ Stede, *Schreiben in der Krise*, 92.

⁵⁵ Eve Salisbury, "Chaucer's 'Wife,' the Law, and the Middle English Breton Lays," *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, 73–93.

⁵⁶ Hans Folz (1435/1440–1513) also composed a version of the same tale, see Stede, *Schreiben in der Krise*, 86–94; Elisabeth Keller, *Die Darstellung der Frau in Fastnachtspiel und Spruchdichtung von Hans Rosenplüt und Hans Folz*. Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe I. Deutsche Sprache und Literatur, 1325 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Lang, 1992), 211–14, discusses a few, though little meaningful parallel cases in Folz's oeuvre.

⁵⁷ Marco Codebò, "True Biography vs. False Autobiography in Boccaccio's Short Story of Ser Ciappelletto," *West Virginia University Philological Papers* 46 (2000): 10–15; Steven Grossvogel, "What Do We Really Know of Ser Ciappelletto?," *Veltro: Rivista della Civiltà Italiana* 40, 1–2 (1996): 133–37.

⁵⁸ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, transl. Richard Aldington (1930; New York: Dell Publishing, 1970), 50; Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*. A cura di Vittore Branca. Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio, IV (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1976), 41. See also the eighth tale of the seventh day where the merchant Arriguccio brutally beats his wife for having committed adultery without knowing that his shrewd wife had substituted her servant for herself, thus deceiving him entirely, 433/637. When her mother, brothers, and Arriguccio confront her with the accusations raised against

is saying nothing but lies, the dying man clearly signals to the friar that he strongly objected to the neighbor's vicious and violent treatment of his wife and felt pity for her.⁵⁹

In other tales, however, such as in IX, 9, the narrator fully approves of transforming a wife by force into an obedient woman and defines it as fully justified. In the First Tale of the Fourth Day, Tancred, Prince of Salerno, kills his daughter's lover because he is of too low social status, whereupon she commits suicide.⁶⁰ The issue dealt with here is not "domestic violence" in the narrow sense of the word, but still a form of violence within the family against the female. As the narrative indicates, however, Tancred's daughter boldly defends herself and takes the ultimate action into her own hands, accepting death out of love for the executed Guiscardo. Her father's violent treatment could not crush her high spirit, and she rather accepted suicide than to succumb under Tancred's efforts to preserve his patriarchal dominance over his daughter.

The opposite case emerges in one of the tales contained in Franco Sacchetti's (ca. 1330–1400) *Il Trecentonovelle* where the Sienese painter Mino wants to catch his wife *in flagrante* and tries to ambush the lovers—admittedly a very different social setting, yet still addressing the theme of domestic violence.⁶¹ When he storms into his house late at night, the wife hides her paramour in her husband's workshop where he creates crucifixes. At first Mino does not find the young man who pretends to be the sculpture on a crucifix himself, but the next morning his toes give him away. When the painter announces that he would cut away his competitor's penis, the lover runs away just in time. Meanwhile the wife has safely removed the young man's clothes out of the house and now faces her highly irate and frustrated husband.

her by the husband, she stupefies them all with evidence to the contrary and can even turn the tables. First, she herself threatens him with severe beatings if he ever would dare to attack her: "I warn you not to be so bold as to lay a hand upon me, for, by God's Cross, I'd give you back as good as you gave." (435; "né ti consiglierei che tu fossi tanto ardito, che tu mano addosso mi ponessi, ché, alla croce di Dio, io ti sviserei," 640). Then, when the brothers are convinced of Arriguccio's evil nature, they beat him up badly and warn him to abstain from ever committing domestic violence against their sister (436/642). I would like to thank my colleague Fabian R. Alfie, Department of French and Italian, University of Arizona, for pointing out these examples to me.

⁵⁹ Cf. Franco Masciandaro, "La violenza e il giuoco nella novella di Martellino (Decameron II, 1): La problematica dell'improvvisazione," *Italian Culture* 8 (1990): 39–52; Susanne L. Wofford, "The Social Aesthetics of Rape: Closures Violence in Boccaccio and Botticelli," *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, ed. David Quint, Margaret W. Ferguson, G. W. Pigman, III, Wayne A. Reborn, *Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies*, 95 (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992), 189–238.

⁶⁰ Marilyn Migiel, "Domestic Violence in the *Decameron*," *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, 164–79.

⁶¹ Franco Sacchetti, *Opere*. A cura di Aldo Borlenghi. I Classici Rizzoli (Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1957), novella LXXXIV.

He threatens her with severe violence, as he would like to place a piece of burning wood between her thighs ("tizzon di fuoco nel tal luogo," 277), but she retorts in a likewise aggressive tone, warning him that she can fight him back: "stu mi mettesti mano addosso, non facesti mai cosa sì caro ti costasse" (277). After a few more words between them a fight breaks out, but he has no real chance against her and soon lies under her while she gives him a thorough beating: "comincia a dare a lui; da' di qua, da' di là, eccoti Mino in tera e la donna addossoli, e abburattalo per lo modo" (278; she began to give it to him, here and there, and Mino lay on the ground and the wife on top of him who beat him up in her way). Mino begs her to stop and not to make so much noise as the neighbors could come in and see him entirely crushed under her in a humiliating position ("la donna a cavallo," 278; the lady on the horse). Finally she gets up and lets him go, and he declares that he believes everything she said about the crucifix. The outcome is that Mino submits to his wife as a result of her superior physical strength, and he rather prefers to stay married to her than to cause a big scandal: "io avea una moglie e una me n'ho" (279; I have a wife, who has me). Both her intelligence and her brutal force guarantee her the victory, which the narrator obviously regards with sympathy, especially as the husband at the end characterizes himself as a stupid beast: "Che bestia son io?" (279, what a beast am I?). However, a slightly misogynist opinion comes through, after all, as Mino realizes that his wife will stay the way she is, and no man in the world would be able to change her, basically evoking the ancient Eve-motif, i.e., women as sex-driven and uncontrollable, hence threatening to men. Her violence, although it seems justified at first sight, is also evaluated negatively as it serves to hide her adultery. However, insofar as Mino is not able to contro herl, and insofar as his own efforts to catch her *in flagrante* fail miserably, we get a sense that the author harbors considerable respect for her and considers her violence justified as a form of self-defense, quite similar to the attitude of Sacchetti's contemporary Geoffrey Chaucer with his ambivalence toward his perhaps most famous literary creation, the famous Wife of Bath.

VII. *Die Heidin*

Another remarkable example would be the anonymous Middle High German verse novella *Die Heidin* (late thirteenth/fourteenth century) in which the husband's violence results in his wife's decision to leave him and to marry another man.⁶² The narrative deals with a Christian count, Alpharius, who hears of an

⁶² Quoted from *Novellistik des Mittelalters. Märendichtung*. Herausgegeben, übersetzt und kommentiert von Klaus Grubmüller. Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 23 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag,

exceedingly beautiful and also highly honorable heathen queen, Dêmuot,⁶³ who lives somewhere in the distant lands. He immediately desires to win her love (or her body?) for himself, although she is happily married. In fact, all his efforts to make Dêmuot fall in love with him utterly fail, as she rejects his wooing and remains loyal to the king. For a long time the narrative implies that marital love represents the strongest bond between husband and wife and cannot be endangered by any outside force, but Alpharius finally conceives of a devilish plan that allows him to drive a wedge between the couple and to win Dêmuot for himself.

At first, however, he is about to despair and throws himself into extraordinary chivalric adventures which earn him the respect of the entire country, including the queen. Once Dêmuot learns about his accomplishments, she gets second thoughts regarding his wooing and regrets having rejected the count, although she continues to remind herself of her love for her husband, and she worries that Alpharius might abuse her love if she ever were to give it to him. Consequently, she calls her wooer back, but only to offer him a choice between her upper and her lower part to ease his love pangs in one way or another.

Once Alpharius has chosen the upper part, ashamed of being ridiculed in public for his lustfulness, he hits upon the idea to forbid her to say anything reasonable to her husband and to pay any attention to him. At first the latter is afraid that she might have lost her mind, but soon he realizes that she talks silly only to him, whereas she behaves and speaks normally in the presence of all other people. Finally he threatens her with serious consequences if she does not act differently, but she continues with her previous nonsensical behavior even after his return. Enraged, the king grabs her by her hair, shakes her wildly, strikes her back so hard that he draws blood, and almost breaks her bones. He commits, in other words, a crude form of domestic violence. But his brutal treatment represents the last straw in Dêmuot's decision process, as she drops all her previous hesitations, abandons her loyalty to her husband, and goes to the count to whom she complains bitterly about the physical abuse that she had to suffer. Only now does she characterize the king as her "evil husband" ("mîn leider man," 1710) and rejects him outright as

1996); for the relevant background information, see Karl-Heinz Schirmer, "Die Heidin," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*. Zweite, völlig neu bearbeitete Aufl., ed. by Kurt Ruh et al. Vol. 3, 2/3 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1981), 612–15. Apart from Klaus Hufeland, "Der auf sich selbst zornige Graf. 'Heidin IV' als Manifestation der höfischen Liebe," Rüdiger Schnell, ed., *Gotes und der werlde hulde: Literatur in Mittelalter und Neuzeit: Festschrift für Heinz Rupp zum 70. Geburtstag* (Bern: Francke, 1989), 135–63, who focuses mostly on the rhetorical structures of the narrative, scholarship has mostly disregarded this tale.

⁶³ The name itself is symbolic, as it translates as 'Modesty,' whereas Alpharius's name might signify 'The One Who Travels Around,' see Grubmüller, "Stellenkommentar" to his edition *Novellistik*, 1163–64. The name cries out for a better explanation, however.

an acceptable partner. Instead, she declares her willingness to become the count's mistress and goes to bed with him. After eight days of passionate love making, the queen declares that she will abandon her husband and travel with Alpharius to his country. Once they have left, the heathen king returns home, but he does not pursue the fugitives and only laments his profound loss.

A careful analysis of this tale reveals a number of critical aspects relevant for our investigation. For a long time Dêmuot and the king enjoy a happy marriage, and she adamantly refuses to grant her love to Alpharius (889–92). His love for her, however, is very much determined by his sexual desires, as he immediately requests from her to go to bed with him once she has called him back to her court (1324–25). This also seems to apply to Dêmuot. After her husband has badly beaten her for her insubordination and after she has taken refuge with Alpharius, both their thoughts are exclusively focused on their sexual union. He only demonstrates some concern about whether her lower part has also been beaten, which might have an impact on their love making (1723–25), and as soon as their discussion has come to an end, she invites him to follow her to her bedroom (1744–45). The narrator subsequently refocuses on their love relationship, especially as Alpharius and Dêmuot marry after she has converted to Christianity, but for the modern reader there remains a sense of discomfort with Alpharius's alleged love for the queen. Nevertheless, the critical point proves to be that the king's treatment of his wife is explicitly described as domestic violence with the radical result that she turns away from her husband, abandons him, flees with her wooer to his country, and marries him. Certainly, Dêmuot's irrational behavior, which Alpharius had ordered her to display, provokes the king to turn violent against his wife, so the audience might be able to comprehend his reasons. But Dêmuot suffers innocently and successfully protests against his brutal treatment when she finally leaves her husband who was truly not justified in the slightest to punish her physically according to the previous development of this narrative. In a long monologue the king reveals his deep love for his wife after her departure (1818–77), but he never reflects upon the reasons for Dêmuot's decision to flee with the Christian count. He accuses Alpharius of treason (1823), but there is no word about the beating. In the narrative context, however, actions speak louder than words, as physical violence against his own wife is harshly condemned because it ultimately legitimizes her action, leaving her husband for good.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ This is not to deny that the narrator also plays on the old "Saracen-Princess" trope, deeply drenched in Christian ideology that all heathen men are intrinsically evil, whereas heathen women still can be rescued by Christian lovers; for a sharply negative perception mostly based on Old French sources, see Sharon Kinoshita, "The Politics of Courtly Love: La Prise d'Orange and the Conversion of the Saracen Queen," *Romanic Review* 86, 2 (1995): 265–87; for a more optimistic perspective, based mostly on medieval German sources, see Albrecht Classen, "Confrontation with the Foreign World of the East: Saracen Princesses in Medieval German," *Orbis Litterarum* 53 (1998): 277–95.

Undoubtedly, the narrator signals to his audience that wives do not need to and actually should not stay with their husbands if the latter turn violent. Dêmuot is fortunate enough to have a lover who comes to her rescue and takes her with him to his home country, though we have to keep in mind that Alpharius was also the cause for Dêmuot's suffering at her husband's hands.

In one of the *exempla* told by one of the seven sages in defense of the Emperor's son against the accusations by his second wife, contained in the fifteenth-century *Die Historia von den sieben weisen Meistern* (History of the Seven Sage Men), we hear of a woman who deceives three knights by pretending to welcome them late at night for an amatory rendezvous, but in reality only takes their money and has them killed by her husband. The couple manages to get rid of the corpses, but one day they get into a fight against each other. In public she says something shamefully about him, and consequently he hits her hard. In protest, his wife screams out loud: "'O du böser man, wilt du mich och morden, als du die dry ritter ermödet hast?'" (Oh, you evil man, do you want to kill me just as you have murdered the three knights?).⁶⁵ Once the rumors about her accusation has spread and reached the authorities, the couple is apprehended, subjected to torture, then both confess and are hanged as a punishment.

Two aspects above all deserve our attention. First, the author openly deals with conflicts between husband and wife, and severely criticizes them for their misbehavior, especially as it happens in public. Second, when he has hit her, she vocally protests against her mistreatment and indirectly appeals to the public to intervene to protect her. Neither of these two people is supposed to impress the audience, especially as the wife serves as an example of how little, at least according to the misogynist tradition, women can be trusted, even if one is the emperor's wife. Nevertheless, the narrative framework forces us to interpret this tiny but significant scene as a message that domestic violence was not acceptable and could have, as presented here, catastrophic consequences. Undoubtedly, the essential criticism is aimed at the murderous couple, but aside from this point, the author also indicates that the couple would have gone scot-free if he had not resorted to physical abuse against her.

⁶⁵ *Die Historia von den sieben weisen Meistern und dem Kaiser Diocletianus*. Nach der Gießener Handschrift 104 mit einer Einleitung und Erläuterungen, ed. Ralf-Henning Steinmetz. Altdutsche Textbibliothek, 116 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), 46.

VIII. Der Stricker

If we turn our attention to the classical canon of Middle High German romances and narratives, we also discover that here many of the courtly ladies, married or unmarried, receive rather rude, brutal, and often violent treatment. Remarkably, however, the male authors do not simply pass over these scenes in silence, accepting, perhaps, this form of domestic violence as a matter of fact. On the contrary, both Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach, and also Der Stricker, deserve our respect for their sensitive, highly critical investigation of men's behavior toward women.

The thirteenth-century poet Der Stricker was highly admired for his partly heroic, partly courtly romance, *Karl der Große*, closely modeled after the enormously popular version of the *Rolandslied* (ca. 1170) by the Regensburg cleric Lamprecht. Moreover, Der Stricker wrote a famous collection of entertaining narratives focusing on the crafty and cunning Pfaffe Amîs; and he also composed a number of erotic and didactic verse novellas dealing with the issue of marriage, not to forget the Arthurian romance, *Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal*.⁶⁶ For our purposes, it deserves to be emphasized that in most of his verse narratives Der Stricker examines complex marital problems and presents to us concrete messages about how to improve the relationship between husband and wife. Virtually all tales contain explicit elements of domestic violence, mostly directed against the women, but at times the opposite is also the case. As a representative example, here I want to focus on "Der Gevatterin Rat," as the poet not only discusses the effects and consequences of domestic violence, but also outlines alternatives which might help to establish a peaceful and harmonious relationship free of violence.⁶⁷

The narrator relates of a farmer who feels nothing but unexplainable hatred for his wife and would have loved to kill her if he would not have been afraid of the courts. Whatever his wife might be saying or doing, he disregards it as evil and contemptible, and he regularly states that he would like death to arrive to free him from his wife (18–22). The farmer even goes so far as to act violently against his wife, beating her brutally and tearing out her hair, kicking her with his foot and pushing her around, cursing and blaming her all the time, but nothing seems to be enough for him to satisfy his wrath against his wife (23–29). Moreover, he would welcome it if all people in this world would start hitting his wife, although he has no real explanation for his profound hatred leading to an extreme form of

⁶⁶ Michael Resler, "Der Stricker," *German Writers and Works of the High Middle Ages: 1170–1280*, ed. James Hardin and Will Hasty. Dictionary of Literary Biography, 138 (Detroit, Washington, DC, and London: Gale Research, 1994), 117–32.

⁶⁷ "Der Gevatterin Rat," Der Stricker, *Verserzählungen*, ed. Hanns Fischer. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 53 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967), 66–91.

domestic violence (36–37). The wife deeply suffers from his cruel treatment, especially as she loves him and does not know how she might have deserved her miserable destiny with him (40–45). When she is about to despair, she runs into one of her godmothers who immediately offers her own service to improve her lot.⁶⁸ The wife bitterly complains that she has always been loyal to her husband, that she never overstepped his rules and authority as *paterfamilias*, that she has always fulfilled his wishes and has made every effort to protect his public honor (65–69). Nevertheless, her suffering has reached a point at which further physical abuse would make her prepare for her death (82–84). At this point she wants nothing but the end of the beating: “daz er sich slahens abetuo” (98) and does not even consider any change in the traditional power relationship between a marital couple.

Her godmother conceives of a plan which is predicated on the young woman’s fake death and official burial. When she informs the priest about the passing away of the peasant’s wife, the former is only upset about not having been told about the situation in time for him to give her the extreme unction, which represents a guaranteed source of income for him. The godmother also mentions the cause of the death—the peasant’s hatred and, implied, his violence against her (232–34), but the priest is only concerned about the payment for his services and does not inquire about the cause of the wife’s unexpected passing away. The peasant also does not show any sign of remorse and is more than happy that his hated wife is gone (264–72), yet he soon desires a new marriage as he cannot live without a woman (310). The godmother promises him to find him a new partner who would be exceedingly beautiful (326), shining in her virtues (330), and highly loyal (335). Subsequently she transforms the downtrodden and abused wife into a shining example of female beauty (389), providing her with the best clothing (393–416), completely disguising her so much that nobody would ever recognize in her the allegedly deceased woman (402–03). When the godmother introduces her to her husband, he is completely deceived and immediately falls in love with this strange person (469–77) because her physical beauty bedazzles him thoroughly (483–87). In fact, he tells himself that he could marry her and would fulfill all her wishes and commands, voluntarily reversing the previous power relationship with his wife entirely (490–92). The most important point, however, proves to be the godmother’s negotiations with the peasant as she demands from him that he pledge absolute loyalty and submission. She herself would not tolerate ever to hear from the young woman any complaints about his behavior: “daz mîn gevater grôzen haz / von iu ie muose dulden, / ichn weiz, von welchen schulden” (504–06;

⁶⁸ The relationship is not exactly definable as “gevater” (55) carries many different meanings, see Beate Hennig, *Kleines Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), 121: male/female neighbor, friend, girl friend, godfather or godmother.

that my friend would ever have to suffer from your hateful behavior, whatever the reason might be).

The godmother warns him that her own reputation as a match-maker and member of the community would be at stake as she had allegedly promised that the peasant would be the best husband in the entire world (511–12). The enamored man pledges with an oath to fulfill all expectations in him: “*dâ vür nemet mînen eit / und alle die gewisheit, / der ir gedenket*” (513–15; take my pledge and all assurances, whatever you can think of). The godmother pressures the peasant further and threatens him to withdraw her grace from him if the new bride ever has reason to complain about him (520–24). In fact, the previously vulgar and brutal man promises to be the most loyal, dedicated, and honorable husband for this beautiful woman, promising, in other words, to demonstrate the totally opposite behavior from that which he had displayed before his first wife’s death. Women are, as the godmother states, good by themselves, and men only need to recognize this if they want to establish a harmonious marriage: “*wolde ein herre sînen muot / an ein wîp durch tugende kêren, / der næme si ze allen êren*” (526–28; if a gentleman would want to turn his mind toward a woman, he ought to treat her fully honorably). In fact, as soon as the peasant has been allowed to sleep with the beautiful lady, he is not able to leave her and stays in bed with her a full day and night although his friends warn him of imminent doom as a consequence. Rejecting their advice, he sings a global praise on women’s love: “*ich hân alrêste gesehen / waz genâde an guoten wîben ist.*” (584–85; now I have discovered the grace of good women). But soon his financial means run out and force him to make a decision how to maintain his life without losing her love. When she realizes this new constellation, she reveals the truth of her existence and asks him poignantly what the actual difference would be between her person in the present stage and herself before her alleged death. She specifically addresses her previous suffering and bitterly complains about it, contrasting her present bliss with her ordeal from before: “*von welchen schulden ist mîn lîp / nu sô guot wider ê, / dô ir mir tâtent sô wê / mit slegen naht unde tac?*” (610–13; for what reason is my body so much more attractive now compared to earlier when you hurt me so much with blows by night and day?). Her own interpretation of her lesson implies that he was plain stupid not to discriminate between a good and a bad person (622). The peasant is shocked and worries, above all, about being shamed if the public were ever to find out about his foolishness. Not surprisingly, the news about him being fooled by the two women quickly spreads throughout the country (631–33), but this has the positive effect of humbling him so much that he never dares again to commit domestic violence against his wife or to say anything at all about her. As the narrator comments at the end, everybody found out about his foolishness and ridiculed him, as there would not be a man who could not be deceived by women (647–50).

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this verse narrative. First of all, Der Stricker harshly condemns male brutality against women, and opposes any form of domestic violence, especially if the husband proves to be irrational and wrathful and ventilates all his personal anger at his wife, the most innocent victim. Second, domestic violence emerges as a rather common phenomenon, as neither the husband nor the priest thinks even twice about the justification for and consequences of wife-beating. Third, only because the godmother intervenes and draws on all of her material and intellectual resources does she manage to teach the peasant a lesson and to rescue her god-child from certain death. Fourth, the husband's violence proves to be entirely unjustified, brutal, and self-destructive. Ultimately, the narrator presents his tale as a profound warning against domestic violence and demonstrates that a husband who is beating his wife has no place within cultured society and does not deserve to enjoy any happiness. Marriage proves to be, at least by implication, a matter of open communication, mutual love, tolerance, and individual freedom. The last aspect might be the most important for our understanding of the entire narrative, as the husband does no longer dare to criticize or to praise his wife in any way (643), that is, he allows her to pursue her own life because he had demonstrated utter foolishness and disregard of wisdom when he had tried to control her as her master (645–46).

As Der Stricker's "Der Gevatterin Rat" signals, a functioning and harmonious marriage cannot be achieved if either of the two partners resorts to violence. Traditional misogyny here finds its explicit condemnation in favor of open and well-balanced partnership where neither husband nor wife has the absolute say. Ultimately, the peasant experiences public shaming because he had first treated his wife like a slave, and later, deceived by her changed physical appearance, had enslaved himself to her, which the narrative does not advocate either as a positive value. On the contrary, as the epimythion teaches us, people are easily subject to illusion (647–50), which implies that the use of violence against wives because of some imaginative transgression proves to be a most foolish and condemnable strategy—this even in a male-dominated society.⁶⁹

It is true that Der Stricker does not specifically condemn wife-beating per se, especially if it might seem justified in the eye of the husband as a punitive action in response to some kind of transgression against the husband's rules. But he certainly condemns unprovoked and unjustified violence and warns husbands to exert self-control if they don't want to become the laughing stock of their entire community. Although we would not be able to identify this poet as an outspoken

⁶⁹ Albrecht Classen, "Love and Marriage and the Battle of Genders in the Stricker's *maeren*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* (Helsinki, Finland) XCII, 1 (1991): 105–22; Hedda Ragotzky, "Die 'Klugheit der Praxis' und ihr Nutzen: Zum Verhältnis von erzählter Geschichte und lehrhafter Fazitbildung in Mären des Strickers," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 123 (2001): 49–64.

defender of women's rights, he obviously argued strongly against the abuse of a wife's physical suffering and psychological mistreatment. "Der Gevatterin Rat" presents a rather extreme case of a husband's hatred of his wife, reflecting a long-standing tradition of misogamy,⁷⁰ but the fundamental message aimed at a broad and mixed audience is self-evident: wife-beating is out of the question and cannot be tolerated if the husband wants to enjoy love and happiness.

If we consider other verse novellas by Der Stricker, this perspective gains in depth, but it also becomes more complex as the poet does not idealize either gender and projects a number of cases in which the wife receives severe (physical) punishment for her recalcitrance and stubbornness, refusing to obey her husband's orders (e.g., "Die eingemauerte Frau," VI, 50–65). In those narratives, however, the author does not characterize the husband's beating of his wife as "domestic violence;" instead there it proves to be 'justified' punishment because she did not want to submit under his rule, a behavior here identified as "unvuoage" (344; unruliness, disobedience). But when a husband threatens his wife to abandon her because he hates her for many different, but altogether silly reasons, she also can counter his arguments with serious threats which soon force him to drop his original plans and make him beg for her forgiveness ("Ehescheidungsgespräch," III, 22–27). In other words, Der Stricker proves to be both old-fashioned in his idealization of the patriarchal system, and also a defender of women's rights against male aggression and brutality, especially within marriage.

IX. Ulrich von Liechtenstein

Not surprisingly, when we turn to thirteenth-century didactic literature, such as Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauenbuch* (ca. 1235–1245), we come across remarkable voices that warn against women's mistreatment by their husbands. The Styrian poet Ulrich has earned his fame as a poet mostly for his *Frauendienst*, a quasi-autobiographical narrative in which the protagonist organizes a major tour of tournaments in which he dresses up as Lady Venus and appeals to a large number of knights to join him in jousts.⁷¹ In his *Frauenbuch*, on the other hand, the poet presents a dialogue between a knight and a courtly lady in which they discuss the reasons for the general decline in courtly values. Whereas he at first complains that

⁷⁰ Katharina M. Wilson and Elizabeth M. Makowski, *Wykked Wyves and the Woes of Marriage. Misogamous Literature from Juvenal to Chaucer*. SUNY Series in Medieval Literature (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

⁷¹ Karina Kellermann, Christopher Young, "You've got mail! Briefe, Büchlein, Boten im 'Frauendienst' Ulrichs von Liechtenstein," *Eine Epoche im Umbruch. Volkssprachliche Literalität 1200–1300. Cambridger Symposium 2001*, ed. Christa Bertelsmeier-Kierst and Christopher Young, together with Bettina Bildhauer (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003), 317–44.

women no longer greet men in a friendly manner, she retorts that men generally display rude and cold behavior toward women. Ulrich never mentions 'domestic violence' and does not specifically address the problem of physical abuse. The lady in his dialogue, however, clearly raises serious complaints about husbands who refuse to kiss their wives and prefer to go hunting with their dogs instead of spending time with their partners:

des morgens als der tag uf gat,
 daz er danne so von iur uf stat,
 als er si triuten solte.
 ob ers haben wolte,
 wunne und freuden mit ir phlegen,
 so waer im bezzer da gelegen,
 dan er so an der selben stunt
 nimt an ein seil sinen hunt
 und rennet in den walt von ir:
 zuo den hunden ist sin gir.
 da rennet durch den tac sin lip
 und lat hie sin vil reine wip. (411–22)⁷²

[In the morning at daybreak, / when he gets up from bed, / instead of being tender with his wife / as he should be / and enjoy happiness and blissfulness with her, / he prefers / at that time of day / to leash his dog / and runs away from [his wife] into the forest: / he wants to be with his dogs. / He goes hunting all day / and lets his innocent wife live / without any joy.]

Once the husband has come home, all he cares about is playing with the dice and drinking wine: "und trinket, daz im gar sin macht / gewichet und verswindet" (442–43; and he drinks so much that he loses his mind). When his wife tries to greet him in a friendly manner, he ignores her and goes straight to bed, only to repeat the same pattern the following day (453). Moreover, the woman bitterly complains about men's drunkenness: "ir dheiner nicht fro wesen mac / wann da zuo dem wine: daz ist also" (498–99; none of them finds happiness except with wine: that is a fact). The dialogue partner does not respond to these accusations directly, but raises counter-complaints, saying that women always demand material payment in return for their love (560–74).

When it is her turn to speak again, she suddenly raises the serious charge that too many men have turned to homosexuality (650–70), and then she agrees that women who prostitute themselves for money are not worthy to be called ladies (674). At this point the two speakers begin to converge in their opinion, as he also

⁷² Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Frauenbuch*, ed. Franz Viktor Spechtler. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 520 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1989); all translations are mine. See also the new translation by Christopher Young. *Mittelhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003).

condemns those men who commit evil deeds against women: “ir name, ir lip verfluochet si, / awe, daz si den liuten bi / sint und si diu erde treit!” (717–19; their name be cursed! Oh, how miserable to find them among people, how can the earth bear them?). Moreover, the man rejects them altogether and laments that the sun ever shines on them: “owe, daz si der sunnen schin / immer an geschinen sol” (734–35). Without going into any specific details, he acknowledges that there are men who mistreat their wives and deserve to be shunned by noble society. By contrast, those men who live up to the traditional courtly norms and carry out noble service for ladies are hated by the evil men: “wem die boesen tragent nit, / der hat ere sine zit” (893–94; whom the evil ones hate will enjoy honor in his life).

Ulrich’s text proves to be rich in meaning, though less through concretely outlining how men mistreat women and perhaps commit domestic violence rather than through the indirect accusations and condemnations of evil men:

Welhem wibe also verteilet ist,
 daz si des boesen tiufels list
 und dar zuo ir groz unheil
 hat bracht in also swachez / meil,
 daz si der manne hat einen,
 den man den gar unreinen
 von siner posheit heizen sol,
 wie kan der mit im werden wol?
 wes er mit ir beginnet,
 da mit ist si geunminnet. (939–48)

[Whatever wife suffers from the destiny / that the evil devil’s ruse / and also her great misfortune / have brought so much misery / that she has a husband / whom one should truly call the impure (rotten) / because of his evilness, / how can she ever experience happiness / whatever he does with her / is the opposite of love for her?]

In fact, as the man finally states, such a husband who mistreats his wife (domestic violence) is worse than any manure produced in the world (“unreiner ist / dann in der welt indert mist,” 950–51). Subsequently the discussion turns to general teachings regarding honorable behavior on the part of women and men. The lady, however, returns to the same issue at a later point, inquiring what a virtuous, youthful, and beautiful wife should do if she is married to a “poesen man” (1185; evil man). She herself implies that the only option would be to search for a more noble lover (1189), but the problem of violence, mistreatment, neglect, and abuse within any relationship between man and woman is not dealt with through a meaningful and consequential analysis. Instead, the male interlocutor only outlines model behavior for men which would allow them to live up to traditional ideals of courtly lovers: “nu wil / ich nennen iuch die man, / an die diu wip sich süllen lan” (1257–58; now I want to mention to you those men whom women can trust). Nevertheless, he also severely reprimands those men who prefer drinking

of wine and going hunting with their dogs over spending time with their wives (1312–30). Finally, those men who undermine or destroy women's honor, should never have been born and are hated both by women and men (1433–36).

Ulrich does not specify what form of domestic violence he is addressing, but he sharply criticizes all men who are responsible for abusing their wives, and he unmistakably warns the male members of his audience to abstain from mistreating women, whether by actions (physical violence) or by words ("losaere," 1595).

X. Heinrich von dem Türlin

The same opinion is aggressively voiced by Heinrich von dem Türlin in his *Diu Crône* (The Crown) from ca. 1220, though his particular concern deals with the issue of rape. When the knight Gasoein has managed to take Queen Gynever by force into the forest, he tries to rip off her clothes and sleep with her, but she defends herself with all her might until Gawein suddenly appears and prevents him from committing the intended crime. Even if the entire situation were clear enough in its sharp criticism of Gasoein's intended rape, the narrative itself specifies the knight's violence against the queen: "Dar vmb si starch weint" (11756; she cried heavily).⁷³ Gawein severely reproaches the rapist, asking him:

'Ritter, waz ist dirre gewalt?
Wie wurt ir ie so vrowen balt,
Oder wer lert ivch dise vnzuht,
Daz ir sölhes gewaltes fruht
An vrowen soldet wenden,
Da mit ir ivch schenden
Vnd sei vnd riters namen welt? (11760–66)

[knight, what is the meaning of this violence? How do you dare to mistreat women in this way, who taught you such lack of education to behave so violently against women? You bring shame upon yourself, on her, and on knighthood.]

Even though Heinrich does not address the question of violence within marriage, he certainly highlights the dangers to the ethical and moral norms of the entire chivalric society and unmistakably condemns Gasoein's behavior.⁷⁴ Gasoein does not simply try to force himself upon Ginover, but instead he first attempts to win

⁷³ Heinrich von dem Türlin, *Die Krone* (Verse 1–12281). Nach der Handschrift 2779 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek nach Vorarbeiten von Alfred Ebenbauer, Klaus Zatloukal und Horst P. Pütz, ed. Fritz Peter Knapp and Manuela Niesner. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 112 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000).

⁷⁴ Neil Thomas, *Diu Crône and the Medieval Arthurian Cycle*. Arthurian Studies, 50 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002); regarding rape in the Middle Ages, see Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, 2001.

her as his wife and hopes that she would accompany him voluntarily to his kingdom. But first she would have to allow him to touch her hip (11679)—a metaphorical expression for having sex. As we will see, Heinrich von dem Türlin here picks up a motif already developed in Hartmann von Aue's *Erec*, and both times the intended rape is intimately connected with marriage plans forced upon the unwilling female counterpart.⁷⁵

XI. Wolfram von Eschenbach

Interestingly, we discover very similar messages regarding domestic violence in some of the most important Middle High German courtly romances, such as Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* and Hartmann von Aue's *Erec*. Although scholarship has examined both texts from many different perspectives,⁷⁶ surprisingly little attention has been spent on the violent treatment of women by husbands and family members and the narrators' critical comments on this violence. Two scenes in *Parzival* deserve to be studied in greater detail as they explicitly reflect upon the phenomenon of domestic violence and reveal remarkable differentiations between voluntary and involuntary violence. Nevertheless, they offer clear criticism of physical abuse committed against women and invite the audience to reflect upon the dangers for courtly society at large resulting from male brutality against their own wives.

When young Parzival comes across Jeschute who is sleeping in her tent on a hot summer day without anyone around protecting her, he attacks her without fully understanding the meaning of his own actions. Although she complains loudly, protesting against her mistreatment at the hand of this boorish lad, he does not even care and takes whatever strikes him as desirable and attractive, especially as he is hungry and does not know anything about courtly manners, sociability among people, and respect. In fact, despite his enormous physical power, Parzival acts only as a child, closely following his mother's advice regarding women's rings

⁷⁵ For the treatment of rape in the traditional sense of the word in Heinrich's *Diu Crône*, see Christine Zach, *Die Erzählmotive der Crône Heinrichs von dem Türlin und ihre altfranzösischen Quellen. Ein kommentiertes Register*. Passauer Schriften zu Sprache und Literatur, 5 (Passau: Wissenschaftsverlag Richard Rothe, 1990), 66; regarding the scene discussed here, see 84.

⁷⁶ Helmut Brackert, "'der lac an ritterscheft töt.' Parzival und das Leiden der Frauen," *Ist zwivel herzen nâchgebûr. Günther Schweikle zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Rüdiger Krüger, Jürgen Kühnel, and Joachim Kuolt. Helfant Studien, S 5 (Stuttgart: Helfant, 1989), 143–63; Elisabeth Lienert, "Zur Diskursivität der Gewalt in Wolframs 'Parzival,'" *Wolfram-Studien* XVII (2002): 223–45. Of little use proves to be Waltraud Fritsch-Rößler's monograph *Finis Amoris. Ende, Gefährdung und Wandel von Liebe im hochmittelalterlichen deutschen Roman*. Mannheimer Beiträge zur Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft, 42 (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1999).

which he should try to win (as signs of their love) (130, 29–30; 132, 23–24). He forces Jeschute to kiss him and to let him have her ring, and devours food as fast as possible. Not surprisingly, she believes that “he was a boy who had lost his wits,”⁷⁷ but this does not change the fact that the young man treats her violently, even though quite innocently.⁷⁸ It would be erroneous, however, to talk of domestic violence as the young protagonist does not even fully comprehend the nature of his own performance. The situation changes radically when Jeschute’s husband, Orilus, appears. Like Charlemagne in Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken’s *Königin Sibille*, Orilus only pays attention to the external signs of his wife’s alleged adultery and does not believe her words, especially as she openly admits her attraction to the young lad who took both her ring and brooch against her will. Jeschute desperately tries to tell her husband the truth about the stranger who was nothing but laughable in his peasant-like outfit, and she bitterly complains about Orilus’s assumption that she could have lowered herself to the level of this robber: “fürstinne ez übele zæme, / op si dā minne næme” (133, 27–28; It does not beseem a noblewoman to accept love from the likes of that).

The conversation between husband and wife proves to be a classical case of miscommunication, as both talk about entirely different aspects. Whereas she defends her honor and rejects his insinuation as plainly ridiculous, he feels hurt in his honor and reveals his insecurity in their marriage because she was of higher social rank than he (134, 2–4). Orilus openly admits that all his self-confidence entirely rests on his chivalric abilities, for which he wants to be rewarded with her love. But the couple does not seem to have enjoyed a true communicative community and immediately fails to stand up to the external challenge posed by Parzival’s clandestine ‘rape’ of Jeschute, a fundamental problem throughout the entire romance.⁷⁹ Wolfram as narrator sharply criticizes Orilus subsequent abuse of his wife whom he forces to ride along with him without the luxury of a comfortable saddle and without any opportunity to change her clothing (136, 25–137, 12). Even if all ladies would hate Wolfram, he emphasizes that “Lady

⁷⁷ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*. Studienausgabe. Mittelhochdeutscher Text nach der sechsten Ausgabe von Karl Lachmann. Übersetzung von Peter Knecht. Einführung zum Text von Bernd Schirok (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1998), 132, 6–7; for an English translation, see: Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, transl. and with an introduction by Helen M. Mustard and Charles Passage (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 74; see also Otfried Ehrismann, “Jeschute, or, How to Arrange the Taming of a Hero: The Myth of Parzival from Chrétien to Adolf Muschg,” *Studies in Medievalism* 8 (1996): 46–71.

⁷⁸ Marion E. Gibbs, “Ideals of Flesh and Blood: Women Characters in *Parzival*,” *A Companion to Wolfram’s Parzival*, ed. Will Hasty. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Camden, S.C.: Camden House, 1999), 12–34; here 29; Lienert, “Zur Diskursivität der Gewalt,” 228–36.

⁷⁹ Albrecht Classen, *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung. Die Suche nach der kommunikativen Gemeinschaft in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2002), 236–78.

Jeschute's sorrow would still grieve me" (137, 29–30) because of her innocence and her husband's hateful behavior toward her.

Significantly, Parzival, who will ultimately save the world of King Arthur and of the Grail, gains one of his first lessons as a noble knight by redeeming his own shortcoming with Jeschute and clearing her name from alleged dishonor by defeating Orilus in combat. He forces him to accept Jeschute as his honored wife despite the claim of her wrongdoing, and then publicly declares his own guilt which he perpetrated as a foolish young man who did not know what crime he committed by stealing kisses, a ring and brooch from the lady in the tent (269). Although he was the first one to act violently against Jeschute, his renewed efforts for her allow her to regain her husband's love and respect because she did not carry any guilt. Orilus, however, is severely criticized for his act of domestic violence against his innocent wife, but only Parzival's chivalric deed liberated her from her shameful and miserable condition.

Parallel to this situation, Parzival had also triggered this case of domestic violence by the court steward Keie. His foolish appearance makes Cunneware laugh out loudly, symbolically signaling the arrival of the supreme hero, although neither she nor anybody else at court has any idea about Parzival's true nature (151). Deeply infuriated by her seemingly inappropriate behavior which appears to disgrace all previous knights who had arrived at King Arthur's court, Keie grabs her by her hair and gives her back a solid threshing, making it bleed profusely as a punishment for her allegedly foolish behavior. Again, the narrator intervenes and comments:

in zorne wonders vil geschiht.
 sins slages wære im erteilet niht
 vor dem rîche ûf dise maget,
 diu vil von vriunden wart geklaget,
 ob si halt schilt solde tragen.
 diu ungevuoge ist dâ geslagen
 (wan si was von arte ein vürstîn),
 Orilus und Lehelîn,
 ir bruoder, hetenz die gesehen,
 der slege minner wære geschehen (152, 13–22)

[Many odd things happen in anger. No royal decree would have awarded him the right to flog that maiden, who was much pitied by her friends. Even if she had been a knight, it was a disgraceful way to beat her, and she was a princess by birth. If her brothers, Orilus and Lehelin, had seen it, there would have been fewer blows; 85]

The violence committed by Keie continues, however, as the silent Antanor, who criticizes the steward and warns him that the foreign lad would one day avenge this beating, is likewise brutally punished, having dared to defy the steward (153, 1–8). But despite his violent treatments, Keie cannot control the crowd and cannot

prevent Parzival from observing the thrashing of both Cunneware and Antanor and pledging for himself that he will punish Keie for his misdeeds (153, 14–20) because he feels sympathy for both victims.⁸⁰ Ultimately, Parzival realizes this intention when he unhorses Keie in a joust at a later time, which the narrator comments on with subtle though unmistakable irony (295, 28–30).⁸¹ Even though Parzival's career is determined by numerous battles with other knights, ultimately he learns non-violent strategies to achieve his goal and systematically intervenes to prevent the spread of further violence. This is represented most powerfully in the final battle with his half-brother Feirefiz, when his sword breaks apart, preventing him from continuing the fight. While both rest, they reveal their identities and recognize each other as close relatives. Wolfram does not insinuate that knighthood has lost its purposes in life, but he certainly stands up as a defender of women who are unjustly and brutally beaten and mistreated by their husbands or other male authority figures. This does not mean that Wolfram advocates the end of patriarchy and absolute equality of man and woman, quite on the opposite. But *Parzival* illustrates the dangerous consequences of domestic violence as it threatens the breakdown of marital communication and so also the destabilization of courtly society at large. Those who resort to beating, such as Orilus and Keie, reveal an inner insecurity and weakness of character. With Parzival's appearance, however, the protagonist imposes a ban on domestic violence and enforces the establishment of harmonious, mutually agreeable relationships between the marital partners free of physical abuse.

XII. Hartmann von Aue

Finally, Hartmann von Aue can also be credited with examining the issue of domestic violence in his Arthurian romance *Erec* (ca. 1170), which he developed freely based on Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec* (ca. 1160).⁸² Although the marriage of

⁸⁰ Elisabeth Lienert, "Zur Diskursivität," 235, argues against the traditional claim that Parzival demonstrates a true ability to feel pity for Cunneware's suffering because she believes that the protagonist is more concerned with his knightly honor, here diminished by Keie's beating of Cunneware, than with the woman's violation. She definitely misinterprets the text, however, when she claims, 236: "Cunnewares Züchtigung durch Keie ist im Rahmen dieses Diskurses der Disziplinierung von Frauen und Frauenkörpern unauffällig . . . Gewalt gegen Frauen ein legitimes und übliches Erziehungsmittel."

⁸¹ Joachim Bumke, *Die Blutstropfen im Schnee. Über Wahrnehmung und Erkenntnis im "Parzival" Wolframs von Eschenbach*. Hermaea. Germanistische Forschungen, Neue Folge, 94 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), 116–21; Bumke, however, does not take into account Wolfram's critical discussion of violence outside of the parameters of chivalric activities and its radical rejection as a grave danger for the well-being of the Arthurian society.

⁸² Will Hasty, "Hartmann von Aue," *German Writers and Works of the High Middle Ages: 1170–1280*, ed.

Erec and Enite seems to be blessed by mutual love and happiness at first sight, as their erotic attraction builds a solid bridge during the early period after their wedding, in truth Erec had simply swept her off her feet because he needed a woman for whom he could participate in the tournament against Iders von Niut. Their gazes had replaced exchanges of words (1484–97),⁸³ and the thought of marriage excited both beyond all bounds (2118–41). During their honeymoon sex keeps both so busy that they do not realize the gaping gulf between them as individuals, especially as they never had a chance to talk with each other before their marriage, or to experience any conflict which would have tested their resolve to stay loyal to their marriage partners.

Not surprisingly, when the first challenge arises—the courtly public expressing its dismay over Erec's highly self-centered behavior and absolute dedication to love-making with his wife—only Enite becomes aware of the problem but cannot communicate it to her husband. Nevertheless, when she laments about the downfall of the court because of their marriage, Erec immediately springs into action again, but he blames Enite for his personal failure and treats her in the most uncouth and even threatening manner.⁸⁴ She in turn demonstrates so much personal insecurity and weakness that she accepts all his demeaning behavior, being afraid “daz si würde gezigen / von im ander dinge” (3045–46; that she would be accused of other misdeeds). It gets worse, however, as Erec first forbids his wife to utter a word, then threatens her with death if she breaks his rule, and imposes increasingly painful punishments, ordering her to take care of more and more horses (3093–3424). Enite, however, knows only too well that she must warn her husband of imminent dangers, and so she risks her life rather than to allow the robbers, and other enemies, to catch Erec by surprise and to kill him. Nevertheless, Erec, still blinded by the fury over his own failure as a courtier and knightly ruler, puts enormous pressure on her and threatens her with the most serious consequences:

James Hardin and Will Hasty. Dictionary of Literary Biography, 138 (Detroit, Washington, D.C., and London: Gale Research, 1994), 27–43.

⁸³ Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*. Mittelhochdeutscher Text mit Übertragung von Thomas Cramer (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1973); for an English translation, see *Erec* by Hartmann von Aue, transl., with an introd. and commentary by Michael Resler. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987).

⁸⁴ Eva-Maria Carne, *Die Frauengestalten bei Hartmann von Aue. Ihre Bedeutung im Aufbau und Gehalt der Epen*. Marburger Beiträge zur Germanistik, 31 (Marburg: Elwert, 1970), 31–36, 120–29; Susan L. Clark, *Hartmann von Aue. Landscapes of Mind* (Houston, TX: Rice University Press, 1989), 63–70; see also Wendy Sterba, “The Question of Enite's Transgression: Female Voice and Male Gaze as Determining Factors in Hartmann's *Erec*,” *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages. An Anthology of Feminist Approaches to Middle High German Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 528 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991), 57–68.

Êrec sprach: 'vrouwe, ich tuon iu kunt,
 ir gewinnet an iuwerem strîte
 niuwan ûbele zîte:
 ir enbelibet râche niht vrî.
 swies danne iu gedâht sî,
 sô muoz ez iu ergân.
 ich wil iuch ze knehte hân
 die wîle wir sîn ûf disem wege. (3425–30)

[let me assure you that you shall gain nothing but hardship from all your disobedience. You shall not remain free of my revenge. You shall have to endure what I impose upon you: I wish to keep you as my servant for the duration of this journey; 99].

After Enite has warned Erec of the treacherous count's plans to murder him, and after both have escaped successfully, Erec again expresses his great displeasure with his wife because of another, even worse transgression of his rule. Even though the narrator hardly comments on this situation, he still explains in unequivocal terms that Erec would long have died without Enite's help: "doch ez im solde wesen zorn, / er hæte dicke verlorn / von unbesihte den lîp, / wan daz in warnte daz wîp" (4162–65; Though this was a source of anger for Erec, he would have lost his life on several occasions for lack of vigilance, save that the woman warned him, 109). The more Erec tries to impose a ban on Enite to speak up and alert him to approaching enemies, the more she is resolved to break her vows because she does not want to lose her husband in a dangerous ambush by robbers or evil-minded counts (4267).⁸⁵

Domestic violence, even in the context of Arthurian adventures, proves to be self-destructive, disgraceful, and condemnable insofar as Erec only diminishes his own honor and knightly prowess by rejecting his wife's highly needed help and by blaming her for his personal failure to uphold his chivalric ideals.⁸⁶ There is no doubt that at the beginning he blames her for his own shortcomings, and at the end he accepts the necessity to correct this assessment after he himself had fallen into a coma and then suddenly, once he had woken up again, realized that he could lose his wife to the evil count Oringles. Although the narrator implies that

⁸⁵ Joachim Bumke, *Höfische Kultur. Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter*. Vol. 2 (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), 464–66, provides a number of examples of domestic violence directed at women, but he naively assumes that medieval laws gave husbands absolute and unlimited power over their wives.

⁸⁶ Here I disagree with Will Hasty, *Art of Arms: Studies of Aggression and Dominance in Medieval German Court Poetry*. Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2002), 35, who does not observe any criticism of knightly violence in *Erec*, but entirely ignores the drastic scenes of Enite's abuse at the hand of her husband.

Erec only had intended to test his wife's loyalty (6781–91), Erec himself begs for her forgiveness regarding his wrong behavior and promises her a much improved life together with him, which then becomes reality indeed: "und bat die tugentrichen / daz si wolde vergeben / als ungeselleclîchez leben / unde manege arbeit / die si ûf der verte leit. / bezzerunge er ir gehiez, / die er benamen wâr liez" (6795–801; and asked the virtuous lady full forgiveness for the hostile regimen and the manifold hardships which she had suffered while on that journey, 141). Harmony and happiness now enter their marriage, and we never hear again of any conflicts between husband and wife.

Contrary to the narrator's own statement, the figurative constellation indicates that Erec had lost his self-control and fallen into bitter fury because of his loss of chivalric honor. His demeaning and brutal treatment of his wife meets astonishment and criticism wherever they go, and even the robbers think that Erec acts foolishly and improperly toward his wife (3330–31).

Significantly, this form of domestic violence finds a parallel in Count Orilus's treatment of Enite whom he hits in the face when she refuses to accept his marriage proposal (6521–23). Both times, anger overcomes these knights, which the narrator criticizes severely as a loss of knightly honor—a criticism often raised by contemporary philosophers and theologians, such as John of Salisbury and Roger Bacon.⁸⁷ Oringle's courtiers even speak up and reprimand their lord for his misbehavior toward the lady (6525–35). He claims, however, that Enite now belongs to him, and he as her husband—which he is neither legally nor erotically, instead he has violently imposed himself upon her—would have any right to treat her as it would seem fitting for him (6540–49). Although he quiets all their opposition, seemingly justifying his beating of Enite, he is quickly punished for this by Erec who finally wakes up from his coma, grabs a sword and kills Oringles (6622).

In the larger context, Hartmann presents a significant example of how husband and wife should work out a harmonious love relationship in which they consult with each other, communicate their ideas and concerns with the partner, and also assist each other politically, militarily, and emotionally. As Rosemarie Deist now observes with regard to Chrétien's version: "husband and wife descend the steps

⁸⁷ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: Of the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*, ed. and transl. by Cary J. Nederman. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Book IV, 8, p. 52–53; for Roger Bacon, see the online article (accessible only through subscription) by Albrecht Classen, "Roger Bacon," *The Literary Encyclopedia* (<http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=210>, last accessed on Feb. 23, 2007); for a broad overview, see *Anger's Past. The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Barbara H. Rosenwein (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998); see also my treatment of anger in: "Anger and Anger Management in the Middle Ages: Mental-Historical Perspectives," to appear in: *Mediavistik*.

of Guivret's castle holding hands. They signify equality in reciprocal devotedness."⁸⁸ In radical contrast, both Erec's and Oringle's violent treatment of Enite are harshly criticized, and the romance clearly speaks up against this form of domestic violence. Ostensibly, Hartmann's *Erec* follows the same narrative strategies as Der Stricker's verse narratives, Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken's *Königin Sibille*, and Jörg Wickram's tales in his *Rollwagenbüchlein*. All these authors acknowledge the fact itself, the presence of domestic violence. None of them, however, condones it, and all of them include specific discussions about its dangerous consequences for the well-being of courtly or urban societies. Sometimes the perpetrator proves to be the woman, but in the most cases husbands emerge as guilty of having committed domestic violence. We are justified to utilize this modern term for our analysis of medieval tales because we can discover one specific pattern that emerges over and over. When a husband begins to beat his wife, he does so because he himself feels frustrated, helpless, guilty of some shortcoming, or furious because his own wishes are not met by his wife.

XIII. *Nibelungenlied*

Beating an innocent victim sheds significant light on the character of the perpetrator, such as when Siegfried, in the heroic epic *Nibelungenlied* (ms. B., ca. 1200) announces that he would severely beat his wife Kriemhilt as a punishment for her false claims in public (802). The protagonist, however, tries to hide his own guilt of having raped Brünhild, wife of his brother-in-law Gunther, after the latter could not crush the superhuman strength with which she had opposed his erotic approach on the wedding night, and had solicited Siegfried's help in this highly delicate matter.⁸⁹ Although Siegfried claims the privilege of the *paterfamilias* to punish the wife in case of her wrongdoing,⁹⁰ which seemingly finds the general approval of the entire male court, the ultimate outcome proves to be surprisingly similar to the events in *Erec*, implying a rather negative evaluation of a husband's

⁸⁸ Rosemarie Deist, *Gender and Power. Counsellors and Their Masters in Antiquity and Medieval Courtly Romance*. Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2003), 67.

⁸⁹ *Das Nibelungenlied*. Mittelhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch. Nach dem Text von Karl Bartsch und Helmut de Boor ins Neuhochdeutsche übersetzt und kommentiert von Siegfried Grosse (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1997), see also Kriemhild's remarks about her suffering at her husband's hand, 894; Grosse's commentary of stanza 862, comparing this violent behavior toward Kriemhild with the general attitude of the minnesingers toward their courtly ladies (818 and 822), does not make much sense as the narrator specifically introduces a scene of domestic violence.

⁹⁰ Otfrid Ehrismann, *Nibelungenlied. Epoche – Werk – Wirkung*. Arbeitsbücher zur Literaturgeschichte (Munich: Beck, 1987), 147; for the legal-historical aspect, see Ennen, *Frauen im Mittelalter*, 234.

right to punish his wife without full justification.⁹¹ Erec's brutal treatment of his wife almost would have led him into his death, even though many other reasons contributed to the endangerment of his life. Oringles, however, is immediately punished by Erec who kills him in reaction to his brutal treatment of Enite.

XIV. Marie de France

Other examples of sharp criticism directed against male brutality effecting innocent wives can be found in the contemporary *lais* by Marie de France. The mean-spirited and highly jealous old husband of the lady in "Guigemar" loses his wife despite his attempts to imprison her in a tower. Later, after she has succeeded to escape, she is taken prisoner once again by Lord Meriaduc who subsequently refuses to reunify her with her true lover, Guigemar. The latter, however, assembles all his troops, besieges Meriaduc's castle, and eventually kills him as punishment for his mistreatment of his lady.⁹² In the case of "Equitan," the opposite happens, as the protagonist punishes his wife for her adultery with the king and kills her right after her lover had died in boiling water (60). In "Bisclavret" the lady's betrayal of her husband also leads to her punishment, as the werewolf bites off her nose, the king exiles her and her lover, and many of her descendants are born without noses (72). Finally, in "Yonec" we also hear of murder and its appropriate punishment involving an old rich husband and his young wife. The lord of Caerwent, out of jealousy, keeps his wife as a prisoner, but one day she is visited by a falcon man, and both become lovers. Their happiness, however, does not last as the husband learns of their secret, has deadly spikes put into the window and thus manages to murder the falcon. The lady, however, delivers his son, Yonec, who eventually, once he has grown up, learns his history

⁹¹ The traditional interpretation is reconfirmed by Jan-Dirk Müller, *Spielregeln für den Untergang. Die Welt des Nibelungenliedes* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998), 190–94. On a formal level, this reading would be correct, but considering Siegfried's highly dubious character as a hero, and especially as an extremely dangerous perpetrator both against the Burgundians and against Brünhild, his punishment of Kriemhild represents nothing but an arbitrary act of domestic violence which serves purely political purposes to protect Siegfried's guilt! Seen in this light, Jerold C. Frakes's marxist approach to this question in his *Brides and Doom. Gender, Property, and Power in Medieval German Women's Epic*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 161–64, seems to ignore a major thematic orientation in the epic, that is, the sharp criticism of heroic society, which experiences, as a consequence, its complete downfall, its Armageddon. See also my study "Das heroische Element im *Nibelungenlied* — Ideal oder Fluch?," *Ir sult sprechen willekomen. Grenzenlose Mediävistik. Festschrift für Helmut Birkhan zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. by Christa Tuczay, Ulrike Hirhager, and Karin Lichtblau (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 1998), 673–92.

⁹² *The Lais of Marie de France*, transl. with an introd. by Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby (London: Penguin, 1986), 43–55.

and finds out about his alleged father's guilt. He immediately takes a sword and decapitates his father, meting out ultimate punishment for his violent treatment of his wife: "he struck off his stepfather's head, and thus with his father's sword avenged his mother's grief" (93).

XV. Conclusion

In conclusion, violence between husband and wife was, alas, a rather common phenomenon in the Middle Ages, at least as reflected in the literary testimonies. Whether the rate of rape was higher or lower compared to today cannot be easily determined and does not have any real significance for our investigation. Moreover, the laws of the Church and secular laws commonly supported men's privilege to punish their wives if they transgressed specific rules set up by their husbands. However, as all our literary examples demonstrate, violent behavior against the marriage partner, specifically unjustified brutal and mean treatment, was clearly characterized as domestic violence and was regarded as highly condemnable. There is a surprisingly consistent attitude toward men's physical transgression against women in all the texts investigated here, from the twelfth through the sixteenth century—disregarding examples to the contrary, reflecting a deep-seated misogyny, which also can be cited in large numbers. Obviously, poets could not do much at all to stop domestic violence, but they successfully expressed their profound concern about this violation of individual rights and formulated their protest against this kind of physical perpetration, mostly at the hand of husbands. By presenting examples of domestic violence in its highly negative connotations, some of the medieval and early-modern poets engaged in a struggle against domestic violence, whether at the hand of the husband or the wife, as most powerfully illustrated by Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*. There, both marriage partners attack each other both verbally and physically in an attempt to gain control over the other. Their fight only comes to an end when Jankin is afraid of having killed Alison, which would have led to a charge against him of having committed murder.⁹³

⁹³ *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson. 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987); for specific studies on this tale, see T. L. Burton, "The Wife of Bath's Fourth and Fifth Husbands and Her Ideal Sixth: The Growth of a Marital Philosophy," *Chaucer Review* 13 (1978): 34–50; D. J. Wurtele, "Chaucer's Wife of Bath and the Problem of the Fifth Husband," *Chaucer Review* 23 (1988): 117–28; Susan Crane, "Alison of Bath Accused of Murder: Case Dismissed," *English Language Notes* 25, 3 (1988): 10–15.

In light of these endless problems which surface many times in the literary documents throughout the Middle Ages, it seems as if domestic violence as a theme was of central concern already then. Though some scholars still tend to identify the Middle Ages with absolute patriarchy,⁹⁴ the power relationship between husband and wife was much more complex and diversified than some theological, historical, and legal documents insinuate.

The critical treatment of violence by so many writers from the twelfth through the sixteenth century implies that they were clearly aware of it, disapproved of it, and at times went so far as to suggest alternatives. Considering that we are dealing with a strongly patriarchal world where wife-beating still seems to have been rather common, the examples selected here represent noteworthy cases and alert us to a public discourse throughout times in which the strategy to resort to violence in order to solve marital problems was viewed rather negatively. This seems to be an important perspective within the context of medieval and early-modern women's self-awareness.

Even though medieval and early-modern writers were not specifically familiar with the notion of 'domestic violence' in the modern sense of the word, its utilization for the interpretation of many literary representatives proves to be highly productive in revealing new levels of meaning and intentions. According to the authors consulted here, wife-beating was not an uncommon phenomenon, and it easily could assume dramatic proportions. However, it is worth reiterating by way of conclusion that the narrative structures regularly indicate a remarkable criticism of this violent treatment of wives (and sometimes of husbands). Considering the prevalent context—the aforementioned pervasive patriarchal power structure—this sometimes subtle, often, however, rather vocal, if not vehement criticism demands our respect.

The literary evidence also confirms what legal historians have often observed. Domestic violence was not only directed against women and children; instead it could also affect husbands. In fact, domestic violence was one of the common crimes persecuted by the courts, and as case studies of thirteenth-century Flanders indicates, "[c]onflicts between women and men as well as between two women were not uncommon. There also does not seem to be any significant distinction in the amounts either gender paid."⁹⁵ The literary documents obviously reflected a

⁹⁴ See, for example, Jerold C. Frakes, *Brides and Doom*; Barbara Becker-Cantarino, *Der lange Weg zur Mündigkeit: Frau und Literatur (1500–1800)* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987), 27–28; in contrast, Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England 450–1500* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 93–122, among many others, offers a considerably more complex image of the gender relationship.

⁹⁵ Ellen E. Kittel, "Reconciliation or Punishment: Women, Community, and Malefaction in the Medieval County of Flanders," *The Texture of Society: Medieval Women in the Southern Low Countries*, ed. eadem and Mary A. Suydam. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke,

public discourse concerning all kinds of violence that disturbed and threatened the well-being of medieval society. In this sense, women were not simply chattel in the hands of male authorities, their fathers, brothers, and husbands.

Eric Bousmar's observation of a new paradigm concerning the relationship between the genders, at least with respect to the Low Countries during the Burgundian period (late fourteenth to sixteenth centuries), deserves to be heeded closely: "Female subjugation (which is not to be denied) was tempered by a 'taking-over' principle that enabled women to assert themselves and to exercise power in political and economical matters, although not on equal footing with men."⁹⁶ Since there were so many opportunities for women throughout the Middle Ages, at so many different social levels and in so many social functions, it comes as no surprise that domestic violence against women became a peculiarly sensitive issue both for the courts and, perhaps most importantly, for writers and artists. Women were not simply chattel, though many men obviously cared little about their marriage partners. Insofar as the literary documents reflect a strong appeal to their audiences to refrain from violence, we can conclude that domestic violence occurred, and probably not unfrequently, but it was a topic of public discourse and not simply kept as a private matter between husband and wife. Admittedly, we hear many times of a man badly beating his wife, but she either knows how to defend herself or to raise a hue and cry in protest against her mistreatment.

We should also not forget that throughout the entire medieval period, and beyond, the gender relationship was the object of intensive discourse; hence complains about wives and about husbands surface everywhere. This is beautifully illustrated by the German artist Erhard Schoen (ca. 1491–1542) in his two woodcuts accompanied by the Nuremberg shoemaker Hans Sachs's poems, the first one entitled "Seven Men Complain about Their Wives," the other "Seven Women Complain about Their Husbands."⁹⁷ Indeed, complaints about the respective other gender reverberate throughout the Middle Ages at least from the twelfth century onwards, and also, as we can now add, complaints about domestic violence as a threat to the well-being of the entire society.

Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 3–30; here 8.

⁹⁶ Eric Bousmar, "Neither Equality nor Radical Oppression: The Elasticity of Women's Roles in the late Medieval Low Countries," *The Texture of Society: Medieval Women in the Southern Low Countries*, ed. eadem and Mary A. Suydam. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 109–27; here 109.

⁹⁷ Max Geisberg, *The German Single-Leaf Woodcut: 1500–1550*, rev. and ed. Walter L. Strauss, vol. 3 New York: Hacker Art Books, 1974), No. G.1177 and G.1178, pp. 1124–25.

Chapter Seven

Reading, Listening, and Writing Communities in Late Medieval Women's Dominican Convents. The Mystical Drive Toward the Word. The Testimony of the *Sisterbooks*

I. Women and Literature in the Middle Ages

As I have argued already in the previous chapters, traditional literary scholarship has predominantly operated with fairly naive concepts of what constitutes literature, of who is a poet, and under what conditions truly literary texts were created. Letters, for instance, are traditionally not accepted as 'literary,' but this depends very much on who wrote them with what purposes in mind, under what conditions, and on what stylistic level the epistolary author achieved. Letters composed by highly respected male theologians and philosophers regularly receive considerable attention, whereas letters written by nuns and abbesses, and other female authors, are normally not regarded as equivalent to any literary texts. This dilemma also applies to the Middle Ages, and especially to the minor status enjoyed by women writers.¹

Certainly, the emergence of twelfth-century courtly literature (verse romances, love poetry) can be identified as the discovery of fictionality in the modern sense of the word, a form of literary discourse that is mostly free of the social, economic, and political constraints imposed by reality, but it would be entirely erroneous to separate both spheres as neatly distinct, especially as far as the text production

¹ Albrecht Classen, "Female Explorations of Literacy: Epistolary Challenges to the Literary Canon in the Late Middle Ages," *Disputatio*. Vol. 1: *The Late Medieval Epistle*, ed. Carol Poster and Richard Utz (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996): 89–121; Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts*. Women of Letters (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 10–35.

during the Middle Ages is concerned. Neither such authoritative definitions of literature, originally based on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of the genius and of the original who emerges as a creator of sorts, nor the truly artificial and actually long-outdated scholarly distinction between factual and fictional in medieval literature have been particularly helpful in the full assessment of women's contributions and, by the same token, in the adequate evaluation of medieval literature at large.²

This has been amply demonstrated in feminist and gender oriented studies and does not need to be reiterated here.³ But it would be necessary to remind ourselves that the production of literature and its subsequent interpretation have much to do with power structures, and women have often been at the losing end in this regard, unless they had been able to establish their own authority through mystical experiences (Hildegard von Bingen), or through the recognition of their saintly life style, as was at times the case with Beguines,⁴ or through the establishment of a secular role as a poet, which happened only rarely (Marie de France, Christine de Pizan, Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken).⁵

The inclusion into the literary canon of the Middle Ages is decided by the modern scholarly discourse, not by inherently aesthetic, moral, or ethical criteria,

² For a critical discussion of these concepts, see Gisela Grünkorn, *Die Fiktionalität des höfischen Romans um 1200*. Philologische Studien und Quellen, 129 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1994); see also Walter Haug, *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter: Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts*. 2nd rev. ed. (1985; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992); see also Douglas Kelly's brilliant discussion of fundamental aspects of medieval French literature that can be transferred to the general issue at stake, *The Art of Medieval French Romance* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

³ See, for example, Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (London: The British Library, 1997); Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts*. Women of Letters (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997); see also the contributions to *Kulturwissenschaftliche Frühneuezeitforschung: Beiträge zur Identität der Germanistik*, ed. Kathrin Stegbauer, Herfried Vögel, Michael Waltenberger (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2004).

⁴ Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, trans. Myra Heerspink Scholz. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 207: "Building on an incarnation theology that ascribed a pivotal role to Mother Mary and maternal nature in the process of salvation, anchoresses secured a place for themselves in the Church. Grafting old folk traditions of the wise woman seer onto the Church's gifts of grace, in this case the gift of prophecy, they at the same time won a place for themselves in the hearts of the faithful."

⁵ Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex*, 107–35; see also *Medieval Woman's Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches*, ed. Anne L. Klinck and Ann Marie Rasmussen. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); now see also the excellent investigations by Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing About Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

as the almost complete disregard of medieval literature until its rediscovery by the middle of the eighteenth century—with a few exceptions among the Humanists⁶—indicates.⁷ Hence, until feminism broke a major academic barrier, medieval women's literature only played a secondary role, if it was considered at all.⁸ Today, of course, the situation has been almost reversed, but much work still remains to be done. This chapter will address one significant corpus of women's texts that are little known in the English speaking world of Medieval Studies, fourteenth-century German *Schwesternbücher* (*Sisterbooks*, or *Convent Chronicles*).⁹

But before turning to the fascinating phenomenon of these literary enterprises by Southwestern German Dominican nuns as remarkable testimonies of late-medieval German women's contribution to the literary discourse, I want to examine our present understanding of women's role in medieval literature at large. This will serve as a kind of refresher half way through this book because it will provide the essential framework for the detailed interpretation of this corpus of collective mystical literature, building upon the previous chapters and expanding them at the same time. This might seem to be a digression from the current focus in this chapter, but ultimately it will serve like an inward turned spiral which will allow us to understand these hitherto mostly marginalized texts much better.

II. Misogyny and Feminism

It has been fashionable among some feminist scholars to hold rather negative views regarding late-medieval women's level of education and contributions to the literary, artistic, and scholarly culture of their time. In order to strengthen

⁶ *Medieval Scholarship: Biographical Studies on the Formation of a Discipline*. Vol. 1: *History*, ed. Helen Damico and Joseph B. Zavadil (†) (New York and London: Garland, 1995), includes entries on Jean Bolland (1596–1665), Jean Mabillon (1632–1707), Lodovico Antonio Muratori (1672–1750), Edward Gibbon (1737–1794), Georg Waitz (1813–1886), William Stubbs (1825–1901), and later medievalists.

⁷ See the contributions to *Medieval German Voices in the 21st Century: The Paradigmatic Function of Medieval German Studies for German Studies. A Collection of Essays*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft, 46 (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 2000). See also the excellent bibliography by Siegfried Grosse and Ursula Rautenberg, *Die Rezeption mittelalterlicher deutscher Dichtung: Eine Bibliographie ihrer Übersetzungen und Bearbeitungen seit der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989).

⁸ A noteworthy exception proves to be Lotte Traeger, "Das Frauenschrifttum in Deutschland von 1500–1600," Ph.D. thesis, Prague 1943. Unfortunately, and really undeservedly, her excellent thesis has remained almost unknown among Germanists.

⁹ A bare-bone but concise description of this genre is given by Gertrud Jaron Lewis, "Sister-Books," *Medieval Germany: An Encyclopedia*, ed. John M. Jeep (New York and London: Garland, 2001), 723–24.

modern struggles for gender equality, they tend to refer to the 'negative' situation in the Middle Ages when women were allegedly entirely subjugated and could not participate in the public, literary, discourse, and were regularly abused, beaten, and hence silenced.¹⁰ Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley, for instance, comment that "attempts to map the range and variety of women's subjective experiences cannot be based on the textual evidence left by the extraordinary few whose proximity to power and influence allowed them to write and publish."¹¹ Georges Duby, almost in a self-defeating manner, formulated the absolutist statement: "We have to accept that nothing of women appears except through male eyes."¹² Moreover, according to Duby, medieval women "are doomed to remain for us only shadowy figures, without shape, without depth, without individuality."¹³ In fact, lamentations about women's social, intellectual, and political disadvantages at previous periods seem to be more appealing to modern sensitivities than to identify the actual level of intellectual education that women received in the Middle Ages.¹⁴ Certainly, any superficial analysis of a medieval text could bear witness for this modern thesis regarding women's overall subjugation, or muteness.¹⁵ Modern scholars such as Theodore L. Steinberg

¹⁰ See Barbara Becker-Cantarino's by now almost classical formulation of the title for her book, *Der lange Weg zur Mündigkeit: Frau und Literatur (1500–1800)* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987), 149–70. As to medieval women's suffering from domestic violence, see the previous chapter in this book; see also, Louise O. Vasvári, "'Buon cavallo e mal cavallo vuole sprone, e buona femina e mala femina vuol bastone': Medieval Cultural Fictions of Wife Battering," *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early-Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 278 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 313–36.

¹¹ Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley, "The Lady Vanishes: The Problem of Women's Absence in Late Medieval and Renaissance Texts," *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings: Essays in Contextual Criticism*, ed. eadem (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 1–17; here 3; see also Ursula Liebertz-Grün, "Frau und Herrscherin. Zur Sozialisation deutscher Adelige (1150–1450)," *Auf der Suche nach der Frau im Mittelalter*, ed. Bea Lundt (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1991), 184–87.

¹² Georges Duby, *Women of the Twelfth Century*. Vol. 1: *Eleanor of Aquitaine and Six Others*, trans. Jean Birrell (1995; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 3.

¹³ Georges Duby, *Women of the Twelfth Century*, 2.

¹⁴ See, for example, the contributions to *Listen Daughter: the Speculum Virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Constant J. Mews. New Middle Ages (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). A fruitful Spanish perspective is provided by Ronald E. Surtz, *Writing Women in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain: the Mothers of Saint Teresa of Avila*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); very productive proves to be Angela M. Lucas's study, *Women in the Middle Ages: Religion, Marriage, and Letters* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1983).

¹⁵ Particularly traditional historians seem to subscribe to this notion, see, for example, Tzotcho Boiadjiev, *Die Nacht im Mittelalter*. Aus dem Bulgarischen übersetzt von Barbara Müller (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), 357–63. For a critical discussion of the terms 'oppression' versus 'gender hierarchy' or 'gender inequality,' see Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the*

continue to perpetuate the general perception that medieval literature was, with very few exceptions, a matter for men only.¹⁶ This even applies to famous Georges Duby, as Virginie Greene has brilliantly demonstrated recently. Her critique of Duby strikingly applies to a whole generation of male medievalists: "Although Duby was theoretically aware of gender differences and of issues related to gender in medieval societies, the image of the Middle Ages that he proposed was gender-blind. He was certainly aware of these gender issues in his own time and culture. But for some reason, the Middle Ages appeared to him as uniformly 'male.'"¹⁷

In fact, poets such as Ulrich von Liechtenstein (ca. 1200–1275) explicitly spelled out that women had to submit under men's rule and hence had to observe silence, both in oral and in written form. In his *Frauenbuch*, for instance, the figure of Ulrich who joins the two persons debating the gender relationship, comments: "diu wip müezen beide tuon und lan / an allen dingen waz wir man / wellen und uns dunket guot" (women have to do and let everything happen what we men want and what seems good for us).¹⁸ He even uses the attribute "undertan" (1935; subject) to define women's relationship to men. The context, however, immediately makes clear that this has to be read as tongue-in-cheek. His fictional interlocutor, for instance, injects that in fact the reverse situation seems to be the case, almost a dangerous one for men: "ob wir man alle solten / tuon daz frawen diuchte guot, / so gewunnen si grozen übermuot" (1956–58; if we men were to do whatever women consider necessary to do, the latter would easily grow arrogant). However, the narrator calms him down and assures him that "si sint tugentlich gemuot, / si sint wandelunge fri, / in ist hohe tugende bi, / daz all der welte freude

Challenge of Feminism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 21–23, and 28.

¹⁶ Theodore L. Steinberg, *Reading the Middle Ages: An Introduction to Medieval Literature* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 2003), discusses Beowulf, Chrétien de Troyes, the *Romance of the Rose*, Jewish literature, sagas, Dante, the works by the *Pearl* poet, and Chaucer. The only exception proves to be Marie de France, the usual fig leaf for male medievalists, and the *Tale of Genji*. For a highly critical assessment of the allegedly dwindling interest in premodern women writers among colleagues in the field of Modern Languages, see Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters*, 33–48. She summarizes the situation most poignantly with regard to Women Studies: "instead of a lost golden age that feminists can work to recover, the past is now caricatured as a wretched abyss from which today's feminists have luckily escaped. . . . Worse yet, this tiny slice of the past is flattened so as to create a passive reflection of today's feminism." (39)

¹⁷ Virginie Greene, "The Knight, the Woman, and the Historian: Georges Duby and Courtly Love," *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 278 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 43–63; here 62.

¹⁸ Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Frauenbuch*, ed. Franz Viktor Spechtler. *Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik*, 520 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1989), 1937–39. See now also Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Frauenbuch*, ed., trans. and commentary Christopher Young. *Mittelhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003).

stat / an in . . ." (1989–93; they are virtuous, constant, high honors live with them, and all joys in this world derive from them).¹⁹

Undoubtedly, literary statements such as these, highly contradictory in themselves, beg the question what role medieval women actually played and how we can assess their contributions to public and private culture. Our study of Hildegard von Bingen and Marie de France has already shed important light on the public respect individual female personalities did enjoy in the Middle Ages. We have also seen how much respect male courtly authors paid to their female characters and idealized them in remarkable contrast to the male heroes. But Ulrich von Liechtenstein indicates a degree of uncertainty regarding the question how to assess women's specific function within courtly society, especially because he as the narrator defines women's role first as being subordinate and passive, but then places them on the highest pedestal possible. As we know from his *Frauendienst* (ca. 1240, written probably before his *Frauenbuch*), he did not hesitate to project the courtly lady as thoroughly educated, whereas the wooing knight does not even know how to write and read and entirely depends on his scribe to inform him about the content of a letter written by his lady.²⁰

As many art historians have recently demonstrated, numerous medieval book illustrations and tapestry, needlework, wall paintings, and famous sculptures were the work of convent women and professional artists. Some of them left us their own portraits, others signed their art work, others discussed it in the official documents of their convents. The sheer number of female artists from the Middle Ages is breath-taking, inviting us to reconsider all our traditional notions about gender relations in premodern times both in the fields of the arts and literature.²¹

¹⁹ For further discussions of the *Frauenbuch*, see Hans-Joachim Behr, "Frauendienst als Ordnungsprinzip. Zum Verständnis von Wirklichkeit und deren Bewältigung im 'Frauenbuch' Ulrichs von Liechtenstein," *Die mittelalterliche Literatur in der Steiermark*, ed. Alfred Ebenbauer, Fritz Peter Knapp, Anton Schwob. Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik, Reihe A, Kongreßberichte, 23 (Bern and Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1988), 1–13; Elke Brüggem, "Minnelehre und Gesellschaftskritik im 13. Jahrhundert. Zum 'Frauenbuch' Ulrichs von Liechtenstein," *Euphorion* 83 (1989): 72–97.

²⁰ Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Frauendienst*, ed. Franz Viktor Spechtler. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 485 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1987).

²¹ Karen Petersen and J. J. Wilson, *Women Artists. Recognition and Reappraisal from the Early Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (1978; London: The Women's Press, 1985), chapter 2: The Middle Ages, 11–21 (with numerous illustrations); Brigitte Uhde-Stahl, "Figürliche Buchmalereien in den spätmittelalterlichen Handschriften der Lüneburger Frauenklöster," *Niederdeutsche Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte* 17 (1978): 25–60. It seems questionable, however, to disqualify all art by these nuns in the "Heideklöster" by characterizing it as "Unbeholfenheit von Komposition und Zeichnung," 25. Here she follows Marie Schuette *Gestickte Bildteppiche und Decken des Mittelalters*. 2 Vols. (Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1927), Vol. 1, XV; for a contrastive view, see Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: the Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1997); idem, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York:

Medieval convents, above all, prove to be the most important art centers for religious women,²² and it is here where we also encounter many important women writers and poets who resorted to virtual pilgrimages, hymns, prayers, and mystical accounts to reflect upon their quest for and interaction with the Godhead.²³ In fact, medieval convents were truly intellectual centers for women interested in the arts, literature, and music.²⁴ As Anne Winston-Allen illustrates in her survey of late-medieval women convents, many of them focused on intensive literary studies, produced numerous copies of important religious texts, and more often than not had creative writers among their membership: "Fine copying and library building thus became a way of adding to the prestige of the house as well as meeting a need for group and individual reading material."²⁵ One of the major reason for the intensive efforts among these women was the reform originating from the movement of New Devout or Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life (*devotio moderna*) that had effected their convents: "The particular impetus for this activity at reformed women's houses was . . . the desire of Observants to provide vernacular table readings and suitable materials with which to educate newly reformed women in the spirituality of the Observance."²⁶

Consequently, when we search for medieval women authors it appears to be most appropriate if we approach the issue from non-traditional perspectives and do not try to identify specifically secular writers of the ilk represented by Chrétien de Troyes, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Giovanni Boccaccio. These male authors enjoyed high public recognition and did not face any gender-specific challenges—which is the case today as well. Similarly as in several other chapters of this book, as a starting point for our discussion of women's literary discourse, we might have to raise the question whether the Anglo-Norman poet Marie de France (ca. 1170–1200) simply was the famous exception to this rule, or whether her literary work formed part of a larger corpus of medieval women's

Zone Books, 1998); for a detailed study of women's tapestry art work, see Leonie von Wilckens, "Die Bildfolge von Gawan auf dem gestickten Behang in Braunschweig," *Niederdeutsche Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte* 33 (1994): 41–56.

²² See, for instance, *Vita artistica nel monastero femminile: exempla*, ed. Vera Fortunati Pietrantonio. Bibliotheca di storia dell'arte (Bologna: Editrice Compositori, 2002).

²³ For virtual pilgrimages realized through the reading and reenactment of pilgrimage accounts, such as Felix Fabri's *Sionpilger* (ca. 1490), see Albrecht Classen, "Imaginary Experience of the Divine: Felix Fabri's *Sionspilger*. Late-Medieval Pilgrimage Literature as a Window into Religious Mentality," *Studies in Spirituality* 15 (2005): 109–28.

²⁴ Kathryn M. Rudy, *Nun's Virtual Pilgrimages in the Late Middle Ages* (Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming); Wybren Scheepisma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The 'Modern Devotion', the Canonesses of Windesheim, and their Writings*, transl. David F. Johnson (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2004); Albrecht Classen, "The Medieval Monastery as a 'Gesamtkunstwerk.' The Case of the 'Heideklöster' Wienhausen and Ebbsdorf," *Studi medievali* XLIII, II (2002): 503–34.

²⁵ Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, 174.

²⁶ Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, 175.

writing.²⁷ Although medieval culture seems to have been deeply influenced by patriarchy, particularly because the pages of most historical documents seem to be filled primarily with names of men, a careful analysis of various aspects of late-medieval society easily undermines this paradigm and suggests significant alternative perspectives.²⁸ Insofar as recent investigations of early-medieval women's life and creative activities have made considerable progress,²⁹ we are invited and face many new opportunities to discover a whole universe of female writing in the Middle Ages. Virginie Greene confirms this optimistic outlook when she underscores: "I don't suggest that courtly literature was the product of a feminist conspiracy, but that it was invented by twelfth-century men and women exploring the territory of profane love armed with the new weapons of dialectics. They created a language sensitive to gender within a frame articulated by contradictions."³⁰

After all, it goes without saying that human society has almost always been more or less evenly divided into the two genders. Many of the medieval rulers, patrons, even church leaders (abbesses) were female, whether they were actively involved in the literary and artistic process or not, such as the numerous highly sophisticated Anglo-Saxon nuns writing to Saint Boniface, Alcuin, Lul, Adola, and others during the eighth and ninth centuries,³¹ and the extraordinarily fascinating

²⁷ For many exceptions to the male-dominated perception of medieval German literature, see *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*. Vol. 1: *Vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler (Munich: Beck, 1988). Now see also Albrecht Classen, *Late-Medieval German Women's Poetry: Secular and Religious Songs*. Library of Medieval Women (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2004).

²⁸ Jennifer Summit, "Women and Authorship," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 91–108.

²⁹ Lisa M. Bitel, *Women in Medieval Europe: 400–1100*. Cambridge Medieval Textbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 268, rightly laments: "We continue to study what the tribal historians wrote, although we know that they forgot to bring along their women." Her own discoveries, however, allow us to be more optimistic with respect to our future understanding of medieval women's lives and works.

³⁰ Greene, "The Knight, the Woman, and the Historian," 62–63; see also Sarah Kay, *Courtly Contradictions: The Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

³¹ Janina Cünnen, *Fiktionale Nonnenvelten. Angelsächsische Frauenbriefe des 8. und 9. Jahrhunderts*. Anglistische Forschungen, 287 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2000), concludes, 288: "Die Schriften der Nonnen zeigen einen hohen Ausbildungsstand. Äbtissinnen waren oft als Gelehrte bekannt, wie die Aussagen über Leobgyth/Lioba und Gisela von Chelles belegen. Frauen waren den Männern adäquate Korrespondentinnen. Auf ihr Urteil wurde Wert gelegt. Die Briefe geben diesem emanzipierten Rollenverständnis eindeutig Ausdruck." (The writing of the nuns demonstrate a high level of education. Abbesses were often known as scholars, as the testimonies on Leobgyth/Lioba and Gisela of Chelles confirm. Women were a full match to men in correspondence. Their opinions were appreciated. The letters clearly give vent to this emancipated concept of their roles). For a global perspective on women as letter writers throughout the history

Hapsburgian Governess Margaret of Austria (1480–1530), to outline the vast historical expanse of medieval women writers.³² If women enjoyed opportunities to use the pen to write down their own thoughts and to compose poetry, they did so in large numbers.³³ But what did they write, how did they write, and what did they intend with their writing?

To understand the phenomenon of medieval and early-modern women's literature and, more specifically, of women's voices in public discourse during the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, we have to turn away from the well-trodden paths forged by traditional literary histories exclusively dealing with those texts written by male authors and carefully examine what often rather subdued female voices, or simply ignored by modern scholarship, had to say and how they expressed themselves with what purposes. As Joan M. Ferrante illustrates in her seminal study *To the Glory of her Sex* (1997), the formation of the literary canon during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was largely determined by male opinions of what constituted literature and who was in charge of the production of literary texts during the Middle Ages:

To concentrate too much on the negative is to play into the hands of the patriarchal view that women were able to do little, therefore they did nothing valuable, therefore we do not need to include them in our studies. That many women were victims I certainly do not deny, but that not a few were able to control their lives is an equally important fact.³⁴

Not surprisingly, primarily male voices were recognized as relevant for the determination of that public discourse in the Middle Ages, insofar as the past was supposed to confirm gender and power structures in the present. But recent scholarship has demonstrated, for example, that particularly members of female convents and other religiously inspired women defied the traditional prejudice against the female gender and became enormously active as writers, artists,

of Western literature, see Albrecht Classen, "Female Epistolary Literature from Antiquity to the Present," *Studia Neophilologica* 60 (1988): 3–13; id., "Frauenbriefe an Bonifatius: Frühmittelalterliche Literaturdenkmäler aus moderner mentalitätsgeschichtlicher Sicht," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 72, 2 (1990): 251–73.

³² Thomas Tolley, "States of Independance: Women Regents as Patrons of the Visual Arts in Renaissance France," *Renaissance Studies* 10 (1996): 237–58; Dagmar Eichberger, *Leben mit Kunst, Wirken durch Kunst. Sammelwesen und Hofkunst unter Margarete von Österreich, Regentin der Niederlande*. Burgundica, V (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2002); see also Barbara Welzel, "'Die Macht der Witwen'. Zum Selbstverständnis niederländischer Statthalterinnen," *Das Frauenzimmer. Die Frau bei Hofe in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*. 6. Symposium der Residenzen-Kommission der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, ed. Jan Hirschbiegel and Werner Paravicini. Residenzenforschung, 11 (Stuttgart: Jan Thorbecke, 2000), 287–309.

³³ See, for example, Ronald E. Surtz, *Writing Women in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain*, 1995; *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, 2003).

³⁴ Joam M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex*, 5.

politicians, and administrators, whether we turn to the tenth or the sixteenth century, if we consider the examples of Hrotsvitha von Gandersheim (935–after 973) or Caritas Pirkheimer (1467–1532), not to mention the scores of powerful women writers in the centuries in-between, such as Christine de Pizan (ca. 1364–ca. 1431), above all.³⁵ Jennifer Summit now observes: “As patrons not only of individual books but also of writers, women played a foundational role in the shaping of vernacular literature from its earliest stages.”³⁶ And with respect to medieval epistolarity, an area often favored by female writers, she continues, “[r]ather than manifesting a stable, gendered authorial identity, letters reveal that identity to be a sophisticated fiction that is created through reciprocal and collaborative textual relations.”³⁷

Undoubtedly, misogyny exerted a tremendous and far-reaching influence both on the clergy and the laity (and probably also on nineteenth- and twentieth-century male-dominated scholarship), but late-medieval and early-modern women writers such as Christine de Pizan (ca. 1364–ca. 1430), Argula von Grumbach (ca. 1492–1563), Laura Cereta (1469–1499), and Anna Ovena Hoyers (1584–1655) strongly voiced their opposition against negative evaluations of women and initiated a public debate about the gender relationship, the so-called *querelle des femmes* to which even male authors such as Henricus Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535) lent their weight in defense of the cause of women.³⁸ Long before this *querelle* broke out, the Benedictine Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179), famous both for her mystical visions and her medical and other scientific studies,³⁹ quite apart from her leadership of her convent on the Rupertsberg near Bingen, her traveling throughout Germany to preach to the masses—unheard of for a woman in the

³⁵ Dagmar Eichberger, *Leben mit Kunst*, 433–34, confirms with respect to Margarete of Austria: “Sie war eine Regentin, die wie kaum eine andere Frau ihrer Zeit mit Kunst lebte und es außerdem verstand, durch Kunst nach außen zu wirken” (She was a female ruler who, unlike most other women of her time, lived with art and also knew how to work politically through art). As far as we can agree with this assessment, Eichberger’s exclusive focus on Margarete, of course, would have to be expanded, as late-medieval women’s contributions to the arts were quite extensive and not limited just to a few figures.

³⁶ Summit, “Women and Authorship,” 103.

³⁷ Summit, “Women and Authorship,” 105.

³⁸ Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Laura Cereta, *Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist*, transcribed, trans., and ed. Diana Robin. *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997); Albrecht Classen, “Die ‘Querelle des femmes’ im 16. Jahrhundert im Kontext des theologischen Gelehrtenstreits. Die literarischen Beiträge von Argula von Grumbach und Anna Ovena Hoyers,” *Wirkendes Wort* 50, 2 (2000): 189–213.

³⁹ See, for example, *Hildegard of Bingen. A Book of Essays*, ed. Maud Burnett McInerney. *Garland Medieval Casebooks* (New York and London: Garland, 1998); *Hildegard von Bingen in ihrem historischen Umfeld. Internationaler wissenschaftlicher Kongress zum 900jährigen Jubiläum, 13.–19. September 1998, Bingen am Rhein*, ed. Alfred Haverkamp (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2000).

Middle Ages!—and musical compositions, was only one among many examples of highly influential public figures and outstanding authors, to wit, Bridget of Sweden (1302/03–1373), Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), Julian of Norwich (c. 1343–after 1416), among many others.⁴⁰ On the one hand, the energetic struggle to overcome male oppression and to participate in the public discourse on a wide array of topics, and on the other hand, the astoundingly energizing impact of mystical visions particularly on female writers throughout the entire Middle Ages and far into the early modern age provided women with significant access to the written word, as they needed to know how to read and to write in order to express themselves to their contemporaries, to take a stand against their belittling at the hand of male clerics and scholars, and to form a public opinion about the most fundamental questions concerning human life.⁴¹ Many of them, of course, took recourse to amanuenses (scribes), or their confessors to have their visions written down, but ultimately the discovery of mysticism opened the doors for women to enter the world of literacy and theology.⁴² I will discuss this phenomenon further with regard to the Middle English quasi mystic, Margery Kempe, in the subsequent chapter.

The mystics, however, did not only forge a path toward the Godhead through their visions, and did not only create a literary medium for women to express themselves publicly. Rather, one of the most important contributions seems to be the discovery and/or appropriation of the apophatic discourse, a form of language about the Godhead that had not existed before. In Bernard McGinn's words:

New forms of apophatic language that express the mutual infinity of God and the self were pioneered by women mystics. These expressions move beyond the usual accounts of the necessity for eradicating the fallen and sinful will to emphasize that what keeps us from full union with God is the very *created will* itself. Hence, many of

⁴⁰ *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, 1986; Peter Dinzelbacher, *Mittelalterliche Frauenmystik* (Paderborn, Munich, et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1992); Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, *My Secret is Mine. Studies on Religion and Eros in the German Middle Ages*. Studies in Spirituality Supplements, 4 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000).

⁴¹ Fundamental groundwork for this observation was already done by Herbert Grundmann, "Die Frauen und die Literatur im Mittelalter. Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Entstehung des Schrifttums in der Volkssprache," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 26 (1936): 129–61.

⁴² Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*. Vol. 2: *Frauenmystik und Franziskanische Mystik der Frühzeit* (Munich: Beck, 1993), 17–21. It would be erroneous to assume that most medieval manuscripts had been written by male scribes. Katrin Graf, *Bildnisse schreibender Frauen im Mittelalter. 9. bis Anfang 13. Jahrhundert* (Basel: Schwabe & Co. AG, 2002), 262–64, concludes that many women scribes created portraits of themselves and demonstrated a considerable degree of self-consciousness. Many of the religious women authors referred to the highest authorities in the history of the Church, such as Moses, Saint John, Gregory the Great, and also the Sibyl. "Schreibende Frauen konnten folglich mit höchstem Prestige und grösster Autorität konnotierte literarische Positionen einnehmen" (263). Now see Alison I. Beach, *Women as Scribes: Book Production and Monastic Reform in Twelfth-Century Bavaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

the thirteenth-century women seem to find the traditional understanding of *unio mystica*, that of a loving union of spirits, finite and infinite, inadequate to describe the kind of union they wish to attain—an indistinct identity with God in the No-self.⁴³

Although Joan M. Ferrante, among others, has thoroughly studied some of the most outstanding women writers from the early and high Middle Ages, much work remains to be done with regard to the late Middle Ages. Was it really a time of decline for women, and did patriarchy indeed succeed in subjugating women to an extent at which they remained entirely mute? Our first response draws from the realization that we have recently learned to differentiate more than ever before between, on the one hand, literary, political, and theological statements, and, on the other, historical reality as reflected by the “official” documents, and also to be careful in our evaluation of individual situations, institutions, public establishments, and power constellations relevant for women.⁴⁴ The allegedly weak and suppressed women often commanded their own, quite different voices and managed to create a niche entirely of their own, a space of freedom where they could develop their individual ideals, concepts, and values, free from male control and domination.⁴⁵

Ulrich von Liechtenstein, for instance, in his *Frauenbuch*, went so far as to project a female voice involved in the debate about the true value of courtly love and has her bitterly complain about men’s evil behavior toward women. Significantly, the male interlocutor does not reject her statements, he only begs to differ and then he himself condemns those men who are such despicable representatives of their sex: “ir name, ir lip verfluochet si, / awe, daz si den liuten bi / sint und si diu erde treit!” (717–19; their name be cursed! Oh, how miserable to find them among people, how can the earth bear them?).

⁴³ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism. Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200–1350)*. The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism, III (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 157; see also Bruce Miley, *The Unspoken Word. Negative Theology in Meister Eckhart’s German Sermons* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002).

⁴⁴ See, for example, *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler, Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1988); *Women in Medieval English Society*, ed. P. J. P. Goldberg (1992; Phoenix Mill, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1997).

⁴⁵ See, for example, *Power of the Weak. Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Judith M. Bennett, “Women and Men in the Brewers’ Guild of London, ca. 1420,” *The Salt of Common Life. Individuality and Choice in the Medieval Town, Countryside, and Church. Essays Presented to J. Ambrose Raftis*, ed. Edwin Brezette DeWindt. *Studies in Medieval Culture*, XXXVI (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 181–232; Ernst Schubert, *Alltag im Mittelalter. Natürliches Lebensumfeld und menschliches Miteinander* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002), 224–71.

III. Literature in Medieval Convents

Especially in the German speaking lands, women's religious convents often proved to be extraordinary intellectual and spiritual centers where mysticism, literature, music, and the visual arts bloomed.⁴⁶ Relatively free from external pressures, especially free from being forced to marry and to run a household, and eagerly looking for opportunities to express themselves in verbal, musical, and artistic form, a surprisingly large number of late-medieval nuns composed lyric poetry, copied manuscripts, created miniature drawings, sculpted, painted, wove tapestry, and wrote or spoke about their spiritual experiences.⁴⁷ Admittedly, this might be a too optimistic generalization of life within a medieval convent, but nuns in general could enjoy a lifestyle that lent itself to learning and creativity. As a significant case in point, Marie-Luise Ehrenschtendtner offers a thorough investigation of the St Catherine's Convent in Nuremberg.⁴⁸ Other examples would be the famous "Heideklöster" of Wienhausen, Ebbsför, Medingen, and Lüne, all of them located in the area of Brunswick and flourishing in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁴⁹ They are famous not only for the nuns' spirituality, but, above all, for their artistic creativity (graduals and antiphonals, tapestry, hymn books, wall paintings, stained glass windows, prayer books, world maps, etc.). A surprisingly large number of women convents possessed respectable libraries, both with liturgical and religious and also secular texts.⁵⁰ Whether mystical visionaries actually copied down their own experiences, or utilized a

⁴⁶ Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists. The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997); id., *The Visual and the Visionary. Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

⁴⁷ Albrecht Classen, *Deutsche Frauenlieder des fünfzehnten und sechzehnten Jahrhunderts. Authentische Stimmen in der deutschen Frauenliteratur der Frühneuzeit oder Vertreter einer poetischen Gattung (das "Frauenlied")? Einleitung, Edition und Kommentar von A.C.* Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur, 136 (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 1999); id., 'Mein Seel fang an zu singen'. *Religiöse Frauenlieder des 15.-16. Jahrhunderts. Kritische Studien und Textedition. Studies in Spirituality, Supplement, 6* (Leuven, Paris, and Sterling, VA: Peeters, 2002).

⁴⁸ Marie-Luise Ehrenschtendtner, "A Library Collected by and for the Use of Nuns: St Catherine's Convent, Nuremberg," *Women and the Book. Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Jane H.M. Taylor and Lesley Smith. The British Library Studies in Medieval Culture (London: The British Library; Toronto, and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 123–32.

⁴⁹ Ida-Christina Riggert, *Die Lüneburger Frauenklöster. Veröffentlichungen der historischen Kommission für Niedersachsen und Bremen, XXXVII. Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Niedersachsens im Mittelalters*, 19 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1996); Classen, 'Mein seel fang an zu singen'.

⁵⁰ Sabine Jansen, *Die Texte des Kirchberg-Corpus': Überlieferung und Textgeschichte vom 15. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert* (Cologne 2005; electronic publication on the internet, see at: <http://kups.ub.uni-koeln.de/volltexte/2005/1596/pdf/Dissjansen.pdf> [last accessed on Feb. 23, 2007]), 16–19.

scribe (male or female), who in turn more or less influenced, remodeled, or adjusted the women's text, remains to be studied case by case, if we ever will be able to disentangle the highly productive cooperative web of scribe and author. More relevant, however, proves to be the "literary institution" itself that involves the audience, the composers, translators, scribes, editors, patrons, and distributors as a collective unit.⁵¹ This leads to the further examination of the actual relevance of the gender identity and social role of the individual writer within the setting of a convent.⁵²

Caroline Walker Bynum argues that the veneration of the Godhead, the realization of a mystical encounter, often involved a fascinating gender transgression.⁵³ Likewise, Katherine Gill has alerted us to the intriguing phenomenon that at least in the Italian context "[a]lmost all the Italian vernacular authors and translators had some sort of close connection with religious women," suggesting a rather surprisingly intimate intellectual exchange between men and women.⁵⁴ Recently, Barbara Newman demonstrated that mystical visions injected a particular feminine aspect into Christian spirituality: "Goddesses as mystical mediators offered intimacy with the Divine, spiritual marriage, and participation in the various aspects or energies of God's being. Sometimes this participation is sacramental: Jesus as Mother both shelters the faithful in his womb/mind/wounded side and nurses them with the breast milk that is his blood. . . Sometimes the participation is erotic: Frau Minne is a divine dominatrix and Eternal Wisdom an alluring seductress, while Lady Poverty converts the hard life of penury and homelessness into celestial romance."⁵⁵

⁵¹ Jerome McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 51–54, developed this term for the literary scene in the eighteenth century, but it proves to be a key concept for late-medieval women's literature as well.

⁵² For a historical discussion of convent life, now see Eugen Hillenbrand, "Klösterlicher Alltag in oberrheinischen Städten," *Spätmittelalter am Oberrhein. Alltag, Handwerk und Handel, 1350–1525*, ed. Sönke Lorenz and Thomas Zotz (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 2002), 445–52; Peter Rückert, "Ländliches Klosterleben am Beispiel der Klöster Gottesau und Lichtenenthal," *ibid.*, 553–60.

⁵³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. Publications of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, UCLA, 16 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

⁵⁴ Katherine Gill, "Women and the Production of Religious Literature in the Vernacular, 1300–1500," *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, ed. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 64–104; here 70.

⁵⁵ Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses. Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 325.

IV. Sisterbooks

In this broad context it is worth noting a highly curious phenomenon which will be the focus of the subsequent discussion, that is, the emergence of the so-called *Sisterbook* in late-medieval Germany, a unique genre of mystical literature little studied and even less understood.⁵⁶ Mysticism is normally associated with outstanding individuals who were graced by the Godhead with the experience of personal visions or revelations. These mystics then began to record these visions and thus gained public recognition or were, as it happened in a number of highly contrastive cases (Marguerite de Porete [Porette], Jeanne d'Arc), rejected, accused, and eventually burned at the stake.⁵⁷ Sometimes, however, entire female communities experienced revelations and collectively created *Sisterbooks* in which they recorded these revelations or had them written down by one person in charge of the written preservation of the mystical visions. These collections of women's texts are characterized, as Johanna Thali discovered, by a considerable variance of thematic orientations, although each *Sisterbook* reflects a remarkable conceptional unity.⁵⁸ Thali also suggests that these *Sisterbooks* served the "Darstellung der Auserwähltheit der Gemeinschaft als Ort göttlichen Gnadenwirkens" (representation of the community's selection as a site of divine manifestation of God's grace).⁵⁹ But the literary quality, and the fundamental intention to make their own voices heard, hence to participate in the literary discourse of their time also need to be considered as part of the overall project of the present study.⁶⁰

We know primarily of nine major convents where this phenomenon took place, all of them located within the Dominican province of Teutonia in the Southwest of modern Germany, in the Northeast of France, and in Switzerland: Adelhausen, Diessenhofen, Engeltal, Gotteszell, Kirchberg, Oetenbach, Töss, Unterlinden, and Weiler. Interestingly, these well-organized miscellanies found a wider readership, as documented by the fairly large number of manuscripts containing copies of the *Nonnenbücher* from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The remarkable aspect of all of these mystical documents rests in the authors' explicit reflection upon

⁵⁶ See, however, Rebecca L. R. Garber's monograph, *Feminine Figurae. Representations of Gender in Religious Texts by Medieval German Women Writers, 1100–1375*. Studies in Medieval History and Culture, 10 (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 61–104.

⁵⁷ The coupling of Marguerite Porete and Jeanne d'Arc here does not imply any specific connections between both women; they came from very different backgrounds, enjoyed vastly different visions, and even the processes leading to their executions took very different routes.

⁵⁸ Johanna Thali, *Beten – Schreiben – Lesen: Literarisches Leben und Marienspiritualität im Kloster Engelthal* (Tübingen and Basel: Francke, 2003), 286–90.

⁵⁹ Thali, *Beten – Schreiben – Lesen*, 312.

⁶⁰ Susanne Bürkle, *Literatur im Kloster: Historische Funktion und rhetorische Legitimation frauenmystischer Texte des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen and Basel: Francke, 1999), 319, compares the *Sisterbooks* with Heinrich Seuse's *Vita*, but she does not proceed to a gender-specific and literary-historical analysis.

themselves as writers, their intentions, and their efforts to make their reports about their own or others' visionary experiences as understandable as possible and to reach out to comparable women's communities.⁶¹ As Rebecca Garber now characterizes these text corpora: "The *Nonnenbücher* provide implicit and explicit road maps which others could and should follow in order to attain a more perfected state on earth."⁶²

The authors consistently demonstrate a remarkable degree of education and were all well-versed in reading and writing, the result of basic teaching practices in almost all Dominican women's convents where intellectual training was considered fundamental.⁶³ According to Gertrud Jaron Lewis, if a Dominican nun was illiterate or demonstrated any other kind of handicap in her education, she was noticeably singled out and her fellow sisters tried to come up with excuses for her shortcomings, either emphasizing her blindness in an eye or apologetically referring to her obtuseness of mind.⁶⁴ As Marie-Luise Ehrenschwendtner has recently demonstrated, we can assume that the level of intellectual education in Dominican women's convents was relatively high, which finds a good illustration in the recording of these visionary accounts.⁶⁵ Anne Winston-Allen differentiates further: "Although women lacked the formal education accorded to men, it seems clear from their accounts that notetaking and recomposing collations were skills that many practiced and became adept at."⁶⁶ But even this assumption of a little

⁶¹ For a comprehensive introduction to these *Sisterbooks*, see Gertrud Jaron Lewis, *By Women, for Women, about Women. The Sisterbooks of Fourteenth-Century Germany*. Studies and Texts, 125 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996); all the relevant texts are also available on microfiche added to this impressive study.

⁶² Rebecca Garber, *Feminine Figurae*, 66.

⁶³ Suzanne Noffke, "The Evolution of Dominican Life for Women," *Out of a Purposeful Tradition: Common Life in the Spirit of St. Dominic* (River Forest, IL: Parable, 1990), 53–64; a good example would be the situation in the Benedictine convent of Engelberg where the nuns produced a large number of highly impressive illuminated psalter manuscripts, see Susan Martik, *Malen, Schreiben und Beten: Die spätmittelalterliche Handschriftenproduktion im Doppelkloster Engelberg* (Zurich: Zurich InterPublishers, 2002), 247–52. She admits that the Engelberg nuns could not acquire quite the same theological education compared to the monks in the adjoining Engelberg male monastery, but they utilized this disadvantage as a "creative appeal to design their own concepts and the corresponding image designs, instead of orienting themselves because of their respective inferiority toward traditional models, created and determined by men" (252; my translation). See also Alison I. Beach, *Women as Scribes: Book Production and Monastic Reform in Twelfth-Century Bavaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁶⁴ Jaron Lewis, *By Women*, 263f.

⁶⁵ Marie-Luise Ehrenschwendtner, *Die Bildung der Dominikanerinnen in Süddeutschland vom 13. bis 15. Jahrhundert*. Geschichte: Contubernium, 60 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2004).

⁶⁶ Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, 195. She also observes: "Women's avid engagement with sermons in the fifteenth century was but part of a larger engagement with vernacular texts of many kinds. Indeed, it was the shift to their own language, along with the authorization wot write in it, that brought many more women into the conversation The increasing shift to the language of

developed schooling program in women's convents has to be questioned, as Eva Schlotheuber now illustrates with the case of the women convent of Ebstorf.⁶⁷

IV. Katharina von Gebersweiler

The popularity of *Sisterbooks* within the wide-flung monastic network of women Dominicans, perhaps even outside of the convents, is undeniable, and it seems as if the creation of the first and oldest example by Katharina von Gebersweiler, Prioress of the Unterlinden convent in Colmar, around 1320 spawned a whole wave of these texts, profoundly inspiring subsequent compilers and authors to follow this unique model of mystical self-expression. But whereas Katharina resorted to Latin, all other nuns writing or composing *Sisterbooks* relied on the vernacular. Remarkably, although these women consistently indicate that they experienced mystical visions, the actual content of these visions are mostly withheld. Officially, the authors suggest that their revelations are inexpressible, but we might also consider another option proposed by Rolf Beyer:

Diese Frauen, die Verzicht geleistet hatten auf Reichtum und Ansehen, auf Familie und Stellung, ließen sich ihr Ureigenes, ihren mystischen Besitz, weder durch mündliche noch durch schriftliche Kundgabe entreißen. In diesem Sinne stellt das Beharren auf Unsagbarkeit eine eigenwillige Form der 'Selbstbehauptung' dar, jenseits auch der Kontrolle, die ausgesprochene Worte ermöglichen.⁶⁸

[These women who had renounced wealth and reputation, family and social status, did not allow their most intimate treasure, their mystical property, be taken away, neither through oral nor written medium. In this sense their insistence on ineffability represents a unique form of 'self-confirmation,' and this even beyond the control which the written word makes possible.]

The mystically inspired nuns regularly report of visions in which the Christ-child or the Virgin Mary appeared to them with whom the female author identifies entirely, which also means that most of the accounts do not report anything about

the laity in the production and exchange of devotional literature by monastic women was a fundamental structural change that empowered them to participate in a broader range of literary activities than ever before (203–04).

⁶⁷ Eva Schlotheuber, "Die Verwendung von Sprichwörtern im Lateinunterricht," *Erziehung, Bildung, Bildungsinstitutionen*, ed. Rudolf Suntrup, Jan R. Veenstra, and Anne Bollmann. *Medieval to Early Modern Culture*, 6 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin et al.: Peter Lang, 2006), 3–18.

⁶⁸ Rolf Beyer, *Die andere Offenbarung. Mystikerinnen des Mittelalters* (Bergisch-Gladbach: Gustav Lübbe, 1989), 195–96.

the space where the mystical union took place.⁶⁹ To illustrate this peculiar form of mystical revelation, let us briefly listen to Katharina's own words:

Denique circa auroram cuiusdam diei sopor Domini irrui super eandem, tenuis quidem sed diuina gracia suauis. Uidebatur siquidem sibi, quod piissima Dei genitrix. regina celi, angelorum Domina, decore et gloria ammirabili decorata, in domo laboricii nostri sederet. sororum huius monasterii aliorumque hominum circumdata multitudine copiosa.⁷⁰

[Then the slumber of the Lord came upon her during the early morning hour, which was tender, but sweet of divine grace. It seemed to her that the beloved mother of God, the heavenly queen, the mistress of the angels, sat down in our workshop, decorated with wonderful jewelry and glory, surrounded by a large host of sisters from our convent.⁷¹]

Katharina does not lose herself entirely in a mystical or cosmic space, but rather clearly remembers her own convent even during the mystical revelation. Her vision is focused both on the Virgin Mary, nevertheless she does not entirely forget her fellow sisters, especially as the Mother of God reminds her to take care of them and to look out for their well-being ("Ad quos benignissime concionabatur, pia sollicitudine singulorum necessitatibus intendens, dansque eis consilia et auxilia opportuna," 156). Moreover, the Virgin Mary informs the visionary that her Son, Christ, has forgiven her all the sins: "Filius meus remisit tibi peccata tua" (156). Katharina was particularly graced with the vision of the Christ child whose sight fills her with profound maternal feelings, as she "could not be satisfied by the sweetness of the image of the most longed for Beloved. She drew infinite sweetness of divine consolation and excessive grace from the community with and vision of the most divine little boy" (156).⁷² Many of the nuns reported similar visions containing images of the Christ child, whether in almost physical form in the actual space of their church, or within books, as a baby in their arms, or as the Host itself.⁷³

Undoubtedly, through the spiritual empowerment Katharina, and with her many other Dominican nuns, felt strongly about their own call to "preach," as far as this was even possible for women within a convent setting and within a Church that did not allow women to assume any official role, to convey the religious

⁶⁹ Peter Dinzelbacher, *Mittelalterliche Visionsliteratur. Eine Anthologie*. Ausgewählt, übersetzt, eingeleitet und kommentiert von id. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), 155–56.

⁷⁰ Quoted from Peter Dinzelbacher, *Mittelalterliche Visionsliteratur*, 156.

⁷¹ This translation and all following ones are mine.

⁷² Rosemarie Rode, *Studien zu den mittelalterlichen Kind-Jesu-Visionen*. Ph.D. diss. Frankfurt a. M. 1975; Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 1998, 302–04; see also the contributions to *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: The Results of a Paradigm Shift*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2005), especially the studies by Eva Parra Membrives and Mary Dzon.

⁷³ Rolf Beyer, *Die andere Offenbarung*, 199–200.

message they themselves had received to their fellow sisters, and to establish a solid network of communication with all of their contemporaries because the divine messages empowered them to do so.⁷⁴ In fact, they immediately gained considerable respect as visionaries, authority figures, and also as writers,⁷⁵ and because they wrote down their visions, or dictated them to a scribe, which were quickly copied and disseminated. Through this complex process they easily reached a wide audience of similarly mystically inclined convent women (an men) and Beguines all over Germany and elsewhere.⁷⁶

All of their knowledge is, as the authors regularly state, directly derived from the Godhead who appears in their visions, as it is a *donum sapientiae* (a gift of wisdom; Is. 11:1).⁷⁷ In other words, the mystically inspired women are fully aware of the grace bestowed upon them and see themselves as authorized by the spiritual experience. Nevertheless, they do not rest content with this understanding, instead they turn to writing in order to convey to their fellow sisters their visions and thus to incorporate all outsiders into this mystical realm. Writing and revelations thus begin to coalesce into a highly complex and sophisticated process. In order to gain a better understanding of this fascinating interlacing of the religious-spiritual dimension with physical communication via writing and reading, we now need to turn to the actual texts,⁷⁸ here disregarding theological-historical, pragmatic and liturgical aspects characteristic of most convent literature.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 15; see also Dewey Weiss Kramer, "'Arise and Give the Convent Bread': Christine Ebner, the Convent Chronicle of Engelthal, and the Call to Ministry among Fourteenth Century Religious Women," *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages. An Anthology of Feminist Approaches to Middle High German Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 528 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991), 187–207; as to female epistolary communities, see the contributions to *Disputatio*. Vol. 1: *The Late Medieval Epistles*, ed. Carol Poster and Richard Utz (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996).

⁷⁵ Garber, *Feminine Figurae*, 69.

⁷⁶ For a broad discussion of communication within the medieval Church, see Sophia Menache, *The Vox Dei. Communication in the Middle Ages*. Communication and Society (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 51–77.

⁷⁷ Heinrich Günter, *Die christliche Legende des Abendlandes*. Religionswissenschaftliche Bibliothek, 2 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1910), 13; Jaron Lewis, *By Women*, 279.

⁷⁸ All the relevant texts are available through microfiches in the back of Jaron Lewis' book *By Women, for Women, about Women*. It is thus easily possible to read the texts in their original print format. I will quote them by author and page number.

⁷⁹ These aspects are at the center of Bürkle's *Literatur im Kloster*, 53–56. She examines, in particular, pastoral duties, female spirituality, rhetorical self-legitimization, and genre-specific aspects in the *Sisterbooks*, especially in the work by Christine Ebner.

V. Elisabeth von Kirchberg

The *Kirchberg Sisterbook* composed by a nun called Elisabeth (von Kirchberg) and dedicated to the Sister Irmgart, lends itself especially well to the investigation.⁸⁰ She was apparently of Jewish parentage and joined the Kirchberg convent when she was four years old. While the convent was founded in 1237, the peak of its development was not reached until the later half of the thirteenth century. The subsequent centuries witnessed a steady decline, but the convent was not closed until 1855 when the last nun leaving the convent took a copy of the *Sisterbook* with her. Elisabeth includes a reference to the death of Mechthild von Waldeck in 1305, so this collection of mystical visions must have been written shortly thereafter and was concluded in 1402.⁸¹

Elisabeth's introductory comments prove to be highly significant in illuminating the mystic's and her sisters' approaches to writing:

Unserm herren Jhesu Chisto zu ewigem lob und allen den zu grosser besserung. die es lesen oder horen lesen, wil ich ein wenig schreiben von der unczellichen genad und grossen p[er]lut, die der milt got hat gethan der heiligen samnung ze Kirchg[er]perck prediger ordens an geistlichen dingen und an hoher ausgenomer genad. (104).

[In eternal praise of our Lord Jesus Christ and dedicated to the improvement of all those who will read it or will hear it being read to them. I want to write just a little about the infinite grace and great gift which the mild God has given to the holy community of Kirchperck, a Dominican convent, in terms of spiritual matters and in high, exceptional grace.]

Her text addresses a mixed audience, and also assumes a variety of reading/listening situations, as she appeals both to those who will read her text or will listen to it while it is being read to them. She also does not assume that her work would have to be considered as a particularly significant opus, as she implies that she had simply sat down and started to compose her work without special concern about its appearance: "wil ich ein wenig schreiben" (I want to write just a little). Nevertheless, the subsequent text clearly indicates how much

⁸⁰ Siegfried Ringer, "Elisabeth von Kirchberg," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*, ed. Kurt Ruh et al. 2nd, completely revised ed. Vol. 2 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1978), 479–82.

⁸¹ A diplomatic edition was prepared by F. W. E. Roth, "Aufzeichnungen über das mystische Leben der Nonnen von Kirchberg bei Sulz Predigerordens während des XIV. und XV. Jahrhunderts," *Alemannia* 21 (1893): 103–23. The account of Mechthild von Waldeck's life and vision is on pp. 118–19. The author provides us with the date when she finished her work at the very end of her account; see also Siegfried Ringer, *Viten- und Offenbarungsliteratur in Frauenklöstern des Mittelalters. Quellen und Studien*. Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen, 72 (Munich and Zürich: Artemis, 1980), 93–107. Most recently, the *Kirchberger Viten* have been made available again by Sabine Jansen, *Die Texte des Kirchberg-Corpus*; for a concise overview of the history of the Kirchberg convent, see 11–15.

Elizabeth truly aims for a comprehensive treatment of the mystical revelations as witnessed by her fellow sisters. Werendraut von Düren serves her as the first example as she had always led a life of purity and sanctity since the day of her entry to the convent. As a consequence God graced her with a vision:

Es ist ein genad, die unmessig ist und als gross, das sie nyman versweigen mag, und das sie doch niemant volkumenlich gesagen kan an sussigkeit, die so uberflussig ist, das hercz, sel und gemut und alle die andern des menschen durch gossen werden mit unsegllicher sussikeit so volicklichen, das nieman so zuchtig ist, der sich enthalten mug in diser genad. (105)

[It is a grace beyond all measures and so great that nobody can keep quiet about it, though nobody will be able to describe it completely because of its sweetness. This sweetness fills the heart, soul, and mind, and all other parts of the human body so much that nobody can maintain herself in this grace, irrespective of her self-control.]

The ultimate drive toward the written word results from the mystical revelation, which in itself was so overpowering that the nun was not capable of keeping her experience all by herself and felt irrepressibly urged to share it with her fellow sisters. Nevertheless, no written words would be strong and expressive enough to relate to the audience what Werendraut actually went through. After three days in full mystical coma during which her body appeared like being dead ("als ob er tod sey," 105), she recovered from her metaphysical state und began to relate to her community what she had witnessed. But Elisabeth emphasizes that despite all of her own efforts, she could not find any appropriate words to describe concretely what the mystic had seen because of the immediate presence of God: "und wie dick sie gocz werlich befund in irer sel, das kan ich nit ze worten bringen" (how often she truly found God in her soul, I cannot express in words, 105). Later, when Werendraut served at dinner, she had a sudden revelation during which she entered a conversation with another nun, here identified as the famous St Irmgart. The entire convent was able to listen to the conversation, but they could not understand it, as it was held neither in Latin nor in German. According to the mystic, the hearts of both women were within the Godhead ("was ir hercz auf geczogen in got" [105; her heart was drawn to God]). The author still makes an effort to relate to her audience something of this mystical phenomenon and turns to a more concrete case: "Doch zu einem urkund ir hohen unmessigen andacht und zu einer bewerung will ich diss schreiben, das disse vil selige swester ze einem mal stund ze metten in dem kor, und so es in der metten wirt, So hort sie einen hunt peylen" (105; as evidence of her infinite meditative praxis I want to write that this very holy sister once stood in the choir, and when the mass began she heard a dog barking).⁸² This dog, however, disturbed her

⁸² This is very reminiscent of Heinrich Seuse's experience with a dog whose actions served as a

meditative praxis and caused her to lose her revelation, as she later confessed to the monk Eberhart, who is here identified as “lessmeister von freyburck” (106; reading master of Freiburg).

As we are dealing with a close-knit community of highly religious sisters, each of them supporting the other in her efforts to come to terms with the mystical experience, a highly prized grace given to them by the Godhead, every announcement about a new vision was treated with greatest respect. When she felt her death approaching her, she resorted to a reading of the litany and then suddenly died, with the word of God, so to speak, still in her hands. It amounts to a heteroglossic discourse which involves both the mystically inspired nuns, the Godhead, and the author of this *Sisterbook*. The same applies to another group of sisters and their superior, a fellow sister Leugart von Herdenwerck.⁸³ As the narrator comments about the latter, full of admiration: “das sie unsern herrn werlich enpfing in der mess” (106; she truly received our Lord during mass). Two sisters who received the Eucharist from her, confirmed the divine revelation to Leugart and reported this to the author: “Ich schreib es von zweier swester mund” (106; I write it down as I heard it from two sisters). Moreover, Leugart was said to have hovered above her bed in free air according to the testimony of an anonymous group of witnesses: “Man sah sie auch etwen sweben ob dem pett von andacht und von genaden” (106; occasionally she was seen hovering above her bed filled with devotion and grace). This miracle is closely related to Leugart’s intensive reading of the “Ave Maria.”

Many other sisters are honorably treated because of their pious efforts to imitate Christ, to follow his model, to flagellate themselves, and to practice humility and modesty. The author tries to do justice to them all, but she often feels constrained and highly limited, as she admits that there are no adequate words for the experiences and revelations by her fellow sisters: “und mit grossen fleiss und tugenden und ernst kom sie zu so grosser genad, das es mit worten niemant vol sagen kan” (107; through significant efforts and virtues and dedication she achieved great grace which nobody can express in words).

The formulaic *Unsagbarkeits-topos* (a standard expression of the inability to express what has been seen or experienced) powerfully plays into the author’s intentions as she does not need to specify the visions more than necessary in order

metaphor of God’s message to him, see my study “Literary Autobiography and Mystical Vision. Heinrich Seuse’s Contribution to the History of German Literature,” *Studies in Spirituality* 10 (2000): 182–204; here 200.

⁸³ For further discussion of this phenomenon, see Ernst Ralf Hintz, “Differing Voices and the Call to a Judgment in the Poems of Frau Ava,” *Medieval German Voices in the 21st Century. The Paradigmatic Function of Medieval German Studies for German Studies. A Collection of Essays*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literatur, 46 (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 2000), 43–60.

to convey their fundamental religious significance. The more the writer admits to be at a loss in terms of words, the more do we gain a deep sense of the ineffable and thus of the truly divine nature of the sisters' experiences. This does not exclude straightforward statements about the grace individual nuns enjoyed: "Sie kam auch zu als groser erkanntusse, das sie got in im selber erkant, das ist der grosten genad eine, die dem menschen auf ertrich e geschehen mag" (107; she achieved great revelations witnessing the Godhead, which is the greatest privilege that can ever be granted a person here on earth). In this case the revelation was directly reported to the other nuns and quickly gained the status of communal knowledge of the metaphysical: "Ir synne warn auch zu einem mal drei wochen also gebettet in got, das sie mit keinen irdischen ding mochte ze tun haben noch sie mocht geirren noch beruren, und hielt doch die selben zeit an allen dingen irr orden" (107; once her mind was so focused on God for three weeks that she did not want to have anything to do with worldly things, and she had no desires and did not want to touch anything, but at the same time she observed all her rules). Here then we grasp the direct relationship between the oral discourse and the written text, as the mystic's life was obviously discussed in public and then was translated into a figure in the literary document. The latter, in turn, became an object of communal admiration and the fundamental reading material for the nuns in their efforts to gain access to the spiritual dimension.

Nevertheless, the narrator repeatedly hastens to qualify her own limitations in face of the ineffable revelations for which there exist no human words: "was grosses wonders got worcht in irr sel in diser genad, das kan niemant mit Worten auss gelegen" (108; nobody can explain in words what great miracles God created in her soul while she was in that state of grace).⁸⁴ But the confirmation of the true experience is quickly supplied for those for whom the written text does not seem to be sufficient: "Die genad contemplativa hat sie auch gar dick und vil gehabt in sunderlichen hohen weisen, das si lag ausswendig ir selbs ungewaltig, und ir synne und ir verstantnuss was auf geczogen in ein schauung gotlicher ding" (108; she often enjoyed the contemplative grace in many special manners, such as that she lost all her physical control, as all her senses and mind were focused on the revelation of the Godhead).

Intriguingly, the narrator also reflects upon the approach taken by the entire community to witness the process of how the revelations were bestowed upon the individual mystic: "Dise genad und vil ander genad sahe wir als dick an ir" (this grace and many other things we often observed with her, 108). Moreover, the Provincial Cmynt (sic, perhaps: Gemind?), who was also present at that moment,

⁸⁴ For the apophatic discourse in mystical literature, see Bruce Miley, *The Unspoken Word. Negative Theology in Meister Eckhart's German Sermons* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002); see my review in: *Mystical Quarterly* 28, 3 (2002): 143–45.

compared her to a second Moses: "sie wer recht ander moyses in irr mass, und weint innicklich; das sah wir alle" (108; she was just like a new Moses in her own way, and she cried intensively; we all saw that). In other words, the mystic becomes an open book for the entire community to read, and thus also a model for them all to follow in order to achieve the same grace.⁸⁵ The *Sisterbook* in turn transforms into the abstract medium through which the public confrontation with the highly private mystical experiences can be internalized, reflected upon, and expanded, especially as the account incorporates the reports about many different kinds of mystical women and their approaches to the encounter with the Godhead.

Remarkably, the narrator also refers to non-verbal communication among the sisters: "Sie und sant Irmgart redten auch etwen in gnaden mit ein ander an stimm und an wort und alle aussere zeichen, also das ir itweder der andern inwendig antwort, als ander leut mit worten" (108–09; she and St Irmgart talked with each other full of grace using voices, words, and external signs to which the other responded spiritually as other people do it with words). This internal, spiritual exchange is complemented by references to liturgical texts which the nuns had obviously internalized through endless practice: "und ir sel zerfloss in got werlich und vollklich, als geschriben stet: Anima mea liquefacta est etc." (109; and her soul truly and completely dissolved in God as it is written: my soul has been liquified). It deserves to be underscored in this context that the narrator herself regularly intervenes and comments upon specific visions which prove to be too esoteric for her to put them into written words: "Wie dick sie die gnad jubilus het in sunderlicher hoher weiss und ander aussgenomen genad, das kan ich nicht vol schreiben. Doch wil ich irs heiligen endes nicht vergessen, wann das was so gar andechtig und genadenreich" (110; I cannot put down in writing how often she received the joyous grace in such elevated manner and in such exceeding privilege. But I do not want to forget her saintly death as it was so devotional and filled with grace). When she refers to another mystically inspired sister, such as Adelheit von Haiterbach, she indicates once again the relevance of the written documentation of her vision: "Das mug wir in der warheit von ir schreiben, das ir hercz und ir gemut von kintheit auf uncz an ir end durch gossen ward mit volkumer und einflussender andacht" (110; we can truly write about her that her heart and mind had been infused with complete and exuding devotion from her childhood to her death, 110).

Irrespective of the multiple ways the individual sisters experienced revelations, all of them feel a strong sense of community, as their divine illumination was possible for them only through sharing everything with the entire women's convent. Heilweige von Rotenwurg reports, for instance, shortly before her death,

⁸⁵ For a study of the book metaphor in medieval literature, see Eric Jager, *The Book of the Heart* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 87–102.

that she once witnessed her fellow-sisters sitting together in a room meditating and praying, while she stayed outside. She observed a host of angels hovering above them full of approval of their pious attitudes and belief. Subsequently she witnessed a beautiful male figure ("jüngling") who handed out roses to them all, except for Heilweige because she was not part of the "samnung" (community). Upon her request to be graced with a flower as well, she was told: "Ich gib niman, denn der in der samnung ist" (112; I do not give to anybody who is not part of the community). Then he handed out something out of a container from which emanated an exceedingly sweet smell, but again Heilweige was excluded for the same reason, who from then on made every effort to join the group.

Elisabeth conceived her work both as a documentary of past events and as a contemporary chronicle: "Da ich das geschreib, da hette wir ein selige swester, die hiess swester willbirch von offeningen" (112; as I was writing it down, we had a saintly sister, Sister Willbirch von Offeningen).⁸⁶ Through recording her fellow-sisters' experiences, the mystical community received support and help, as the written record testified and authorized the visions.⁸⁷ At the same time the narrator assumed the role of interpreter, as she also analyzed and explained some of the more curious mystical experiences. The sister Treutlint von Weintingen, for instance, reported that she encountered the Godhead as a little child and enjoyed a very pleasant time with it. Later she even felt pregnant with the child: "Sunderlich in einem advent was sie so gar vol genad unsers herren, das ir was recht, wie sie unsers herrn swanger wer" (113; particularly on a day of Advent she was so filled with the grace of our Lord that she felt as if she were pregnant with our Lord). Elisabeth comments on this observation by underlining that this would have to be understood as a metaphor of her exceeding joy and inspiration: "Das sol man versten also, das ir hercz und ir sel und ir gemut so gar werlich und enpfintlich vol was unsers herren gnad und seiner gegenwart, das sie nicht mocht geleiden, das man sie rurt" (113; this is to be understood as that her heart and her soul and her mind were so truly and affectively filled with Our Lord's grace and His grace that she could not tolerate it to be touched).

The entire account, which is considerably expanded with reports of further visions, including divine light, the greeting of the Christ child whom the Virgin Mary brought to her allowing her to hug it (114), proves to be a detailed reflection of the oral report which, however, made it almost impossible for her to copy it

⁸⁶ See the contributions to *Medieval Women in Their Communities*, ed. Diane Watt (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

⁸⁷ This was not uncommon even within the legal and political sphere since the written memory of the past was fragile, often spurring writers to falsify documents to confirm their convents' privileges and land holdings. For a study of parallel cases in medieval France, see Robert F. Berkhofer III, *Day of Reckoning: Power and Accountability in Medieval France*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

down entirely: "Unser herr tet ir unczellich vil gnad und besunder gutes uncz an ir end, das ich nicht vol schreiben kan" (114; Our Lord granted her so much grace and so many good things until her death that it is impossible for me to write them all down).

In fact, the *Sisterbook* assumes the function of not only preserving the mystical accounts, but also of providing strong legitimacy to the sisters' visions, as we hear with respect to Wildbirg von Rotweil: "Des wir alle mit ganczer warheit ir czeug mügen sein von der tugentlichen ubung, die wir von ir sahen" (114; we all can be, in full truth, witnesses of her virtuous exercise which we all saw in her). When specific information was not available, the narrator seemed to have inquired about it, trying to be as accurate as possible and not to leave out any detail, as a brief reference to one failed effort indicates: "Ir erschein unser herr, da sie neuer XIII jar alt was, aber in welher form, das kond ich nicht erfarn" (115; the Lord appeared to her when she was only thirteen years old, but I never could find out in what form). At another occasion, however, Elisabeth refrains from excessive and even for herself unnecessary discussions as the divine intervention in human affairs would not allow concrete descriptions, such as in the case of the miracle that occurred during the time of the Prioress Agnes von Wehingen when the convent ran out of bread. Seventeen loaves had to serve more than sixty sisters for up to five days. Instead of trying to understand this mystical experience, the narrator openly admits: "Waz sol ich mer schreiben, wann die genad unsers herren, die ist warlich und scheinperlich mit diser heiligen samnunge gewesen an allen sachen. Und getar das wol mit warheit sprechen, das ich das tausent teil nit han geschriben, das der gut got diser vil seligen samnung hat gethan an hoher und an gotlicher genad" (117; what else should I write, as the grace of Our Lord has truly and manifestly been with this community in every respect. I dare to say in full truth that I have not written down a thousandth part of all the good things which God granted to this most holy community in high and divine grace). Although the written discourse serves a specific purpose, Elisabeth realizes the human limits of words and does not attempt the impossible, especially as the mystical revelation was shared by the entire community in the first place. But when the opportunity arises, Elisabeth relays verbatim what some of her fellow-sisters had witnessed, transforming the narrative account into an immediate reflection of the Godhead. This is the case with the report by Heilin von Gruen who witnessed the Holy Trinity in person and shared with the writer what she heard the Godhead tell her: "Du pist gewert, des du mich gepeten hast" (117; you are granted what you have requested from me).

The *Sisterbook*, however, does not attempt to go beyond the possible in human terms, as Elisabeth clearly draws a line between life and death and only formulates what she assumes seems to have happened to her fellow-sisters after their death: "Ir tet auch unser herr grosse genad an irem tod, das kan ich nicht eigentlichen

geschreiben" (118; the grace that Our Lord granted her in her death I can actually not fully describe [write down]).

At the same time Elisabeth proves to be very willing to share all of her knowledge, but she does not want to impose everything on her readers at one time. Instead she comments that she would inform us about some of the main features representative of one of the sisters' mystical experience, without going overboard in her description: "und hat ir auch unser herr unzellig vil genaden getan, der ich ein wenig beschreiben will" (118; and Our Lord awarded her with an infinite number of acts of grace, of which I want to write a little).

Obviously, Elisabeth is fully aware of the dangers of an endless number of repetitions, and makes many efforts to vary her account so as to maintain her audience's attention. The intimate relationship between herself and the mystics provides eye-witness credibility, and the fairly loose composition invites all future sisters to share their experiences. As a further indication for this phenomenon we can rely on the deliberate attempt to quote verbatim what the individual mystic testified, even if these were words in Latin spoken by the Godhead, as she immediately provides a German translation: "*Tota pulchra es amica mea et macula non est in te. Du bist ganz schön mein Freundin, und kein Mackel ist in dir*" (118–19; you are absolutely beautiful and there is no fault with you). This is immediately followed by a switch to the third person pronoun: "In diser genad gehieß ir unser herr den gotlichen kuss" (119; in this grace Our Lord granted her the divine kiss), which soon gives way again to the direct speech, this time by an angel who brings her consolation: "Got gruss dich minikliche und himelische, und bewert ir das mit disen Worten, das sie himelische were" (119; God greets you in earthly and divine love, and demonstrates to her with these words that she is of divine nature).

In the case of Mechthild von Waldeck we are confronted with the unusual phenomenon that Elisabeth goes much more in detail and discusses many more aspects of her mystical revelations than in comparison with all other accounts. Indirect and direct speech are equally distributed, whereas the narrator removes herself from explicit comments throughout. It seems most likely that here she relied on an extensive written account and did not see any need to comment on any particular aspects, whereas in the previous cases she felt the need to reflect upon the probably oral accounts and put them in the right context. In the hour of Mechthild's death, for instance, she relates that the mystic heard the angels sing: "Da si da schir verscheiden solt, da hort sie die engel singen, und die heiligen laden mit unsegllicher freud" (121; when she was about to die she heard the angels sing and the saints laugh for undescribable joy). Elisabeth even goes one step further and reports of singing that could be heard after Mechthild's death: "Da sungen aber die engel und die heiligen drei stund: *Veni. Da sang aber unser herr zertlich und miniklich: Intra thalamum sponsi tui*" (121; the angels sang along

with the saints three times: *Veni*. Then Our Lord sang tenderly and full of love: here enters your bridegroom).

Three days before the anchoress Tellekhoven died, she informed the fellow-sisters, among them Elisabeth, about her imminent death: "sagt uns den tag und die stund, wenn sie sturb, und wie sie enpfangen würd, und das unser herr und unser frau selber nach ir komen und unzelich vil engel und heiligen" (122; she told us the day and the hour when she would die and how she would be welcomed [in heaven], and that Our Lord and Our Virgin Mary, along with an infinite host of angels and saints, would come to fetch her). The significance of this passage rests in the cumulative "wir" (we), that is, the realization that the writing itself represents only the concretization of the oral communication, and that the *Sisterbook* primarily serves as a collective memory for the convent community. This is finally confirmed by the reference to the communal "wir": "Wir sehen auch alle, das sie in groser andacht lag, und in groser begird und jamer nach got" (123; we see all of them being in great devotion, and filled with great desire and longing for God). Moreover, Elisabeth clearly reveals how much she herself felt to be part of the community and composed the *Sisterbook* with the entire convent community in mind, as she closes her account with an example of how they all learned from the mystically inspired women: "Da sie also lag in groser gnad, und schier verscheiden wolt, da pat wir sie, das sie uns etwas lert, das sie deücht, das uns aller nuczest wer. Da sprach sie: Ir sult euch zihen, so wirt euch got heimlich, und wirdt euch wol mit im" (123; when she lied there in full grace, and was about to die, we asked her to teach us something which she would deem useful for us. Then she said: Withdraw into yourself, then God will become your lover, and you will be happy with him). The mystic provided them with clear instructions how to enjoy similar experiences and revelations, and inspired them to follow her path through life up to her own death: "Wist, ich stirb in rechter sicherheit" (123; know then, I am dying in full security). Consequently, the written account serves as a repository of highly valuable testimonies and invites all members of the convent not only to read it by themselves, but also to learn from the practical models and to imitate the divinely inspired women in their mystical quest. In this sense Elisabeth's *Sisterbook* can be identified as a collective memory book, the core of a mystical community, which required both constant reading and, in a way, a constant rewriting or continuation of the writing process.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ For a parallel case study, see Jean-Marie Kauth, "Book Metaphors in the Textual Community of the *Ancrene Wisse*," *The Book and the Magic of Reading in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Garland Medieval Bibliographies [sic] (New York and London: Garland, 1999), 99–121.

VI. Engeltal

Another intriguing example of *Sisterbooks* would be *Der Nonne von Engeltal Büchlein von der Genaden Überlast* written between 1328 and 1340.⁸⁹ The author pursues a remarkably subjective perspective as she emphasizes her own role in the composition of this book: “Ich heb ein buochlin hie an, da kumet man an dez closters ze Engeltal anvank und die menig der genaden gotes die er mit den frawn getan hat an dem anvang und nu sider” (1; I am beginning a little booklet in which [you can read] of the beginning of the Convent of Engeltal, and of the many graces of God that he bestowed upon us together with the Virgin Mary from the first day until now). Nevertheless she quickly falls back to a traditional humility topos, declaring her own inability to write in Latin: “Nu wolt ich gern schreiben etswaz von der genaden uberlast: so han ich laider cleinen sin und kan dar zu der schrift niht, wanne daz ich zu disen dingen mit der gehorsam betwungen bin” (1; now I wanted to write something of the overflowing grace, but I have a very limited mind and cannot write, except that I was forced to obey in these matters). Only then does she begin with her chronicle account that refers back to the time of King of Hungary who married his daughter Elisabeth with the Landgrave of Hesse, Ludwig. For our purposes the concrete aspects pertaining to St Elisabeth’s life do not interest us here,⁹⁰ whereas the author’s self-conscious reflections deserve closer attention. She directly addresses her audience as if she were speaking to them: “Wie der dritte alter her ist kumen, daz wil ich euch auch kunt tuen” (4; I want to let you know how the third old man came here), which is then followed by an objective report about historical events, figures, and conditions.

Once the author turns her attention to the mystical experiences in the convent, we can suddenly perceive how the account was composed. Although the author mostly relies on the third person singular, we notice how much she actually reveals the interaction between the general oral discussions within the convent about individual mystics and herself as the composer of the *Sisterbook*: “Nach irm tod do kam sie her wider und sprach, sie wer drizzig tag von got gewesen” (10; after her death she reappeared and said that she had spent thirty days with God). Then she also reports about new members and how they arrived at the convent: “Einnew kom her zu uns, die hiezze Reichilt von Gemmershaim, mit irm elichen wirt, der wart ein convers. Da wart sie gar ein heiliger mensch” (10; a new [sister]

⁸⁹ *Der Nonne von Engeltal Büchlein von der Genaden Überlast*, ed. Karl Schröder. Litterarischer Verein in Stuttgart (Tübingen: Litterarischer Verein, 1871). This text is reproduced on microfiche in Jaron Lewis’ study *By Women, for Women, about Women*.

⁹⁰ *Sankt Elisabeth. Fürstin, Dienerin, Heilige. Aufsätze, Dokumentation, Katalog*, ed. Philipps-Universität Marburg (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1981).

came to us called Reichilt of Gemmershaim, together with her husband, who became a conversus. She then became a holy person).

The author demonstrates that she was either an eye-witness of some of the mystical raptures, or that she relates in impressive detail what she has heard about some of the inspired fellow-sisters: "Da nach etlichen tagen da lag sie vor unserm alter in dem chor nach der metin und wart aber entzugt und kom für unsers herren geriht in aller der guten weis als daz ewangeli sagt" (10; A few days later after the matins she was lying in front of the altar within the choir and was enraptured and arrived at the Lord's court wholly in the good way as the New Testament informs us). Most curiously, she also resorts to a highly dramatic account of Sister Alheiden's conversations and even struggles with the Godhead who insists for a long time that she remove herself from his right side because she would lack proper baptism: "'Ruefet Alheiden, sie sol niht zu miner rechten hant sten, sie sei niht recht getaufet" (11; call back Alheiden away from my right side, as she is not properly baptized). Alheiden, however, fights against this order, first appealing to the angels, then to Mary Magdalena to intervene with God upon her behalf. Every time God sends someone to remove her from his presence, she enters a debate with the person until finally she receives proper baptism and is then allowed to partake of God's own presence: "da ward sie entzuket biz an den osterabent, und sach ellew dev dink die an unserm herren ergangen waren" (11; then she was enraptured until the evening of Easter, and saw all those things that had happened with Our Lord).

We are made immediate witnesses of the mystic's many experiences, such as when the crucified Christ suddenly bent down to her and gave her consolation: "Da nam unser herre die hant von dem creutz und riht sie selber auf und sprach zu ihr" (12; then the Lord removed the hand from the cross, straightened up and said to her). The author assumes the function of her community's mouthpiece, insofar as the chronicle serves them all to have their experiences recorded through one author. For example, reflecting upon a special occasion during Palm Sunday church service: "Daz geschach also: an dem palmabent da beging man unser frawen tag, und da ging unser herre im chor under dem 'Te deum laudamus' under dem vers 'Et laudamus nomen tuum in seculum', und belaib also dinnen biz man in auz gesanc" (16; this happened in the evening of Palm Sunday when they were celebrating the Virgin Mary, and Our Lord walked in the choir while they sang 'Te deum laudamus' and the vers 'Et laudamus nomen tuum in seculum,' and He stayed until the end of the song).

Although the author hardly allows us concrete glimpses into her actual writing process, occasionally we come across a brief reference to the entire community about which she writes in her chronicle: "Ein swester het wir die hiez Kungunt von Eystet, und die waz der stifterin enichel" (16; we had a sister called Kungunt of Eichstätt who was the founder's niece). The same sister witnessed a highly

mystical vision within the convent which the author identifies and describes in impressive details. Since the audience was fully familiar with the local setting, the author refers them to the specific site where the revelation took place: "Die ging nach einer metin auz dem chor da ez taget: do hort sie den caplan messe sprechen. Sie stunde bei der tür do man die steinin stig in die kirchen get, und sah an die stat da nu under kuchen stat" (16; she left the choir once after matins when it dawned: she heard the chaplain read the mass. She stood near the door where the stone staircase goes up to the church, looked up and gazed at the place where now our kitchen is located). While she observed the phenomenon, she heard a voice, and in an intriguing switch from indirect to direct discourse, from hearsay to personal witnessing, the author relates to us what the divine voice said to Kungut von Eystet: "Westu iht gern waz dise gesiht bedeut?" (17; would you not want to know what this vision means?), or: "Ez bedeut daz, daz am ersten anvang ditz closters, daz die die heiligsten leut waren und die genadenreichsten die man moht vinden" (17; it means that at the very beginning of this convent the first members were the most holy people one could find, graced the most by the Godhead).

Subsequently the author introduces another fellow-sister who had also received a mystical revelation: "Da wil ich euch nu kunt tun von diser heiligen Alhaiden von Igelstat, wie ir leben waz" (17; now I want to tell you of Saint Alhaiden of Igelstadt and describe her life). An important element in a convent's life, and so in the Dominican order as well, was the reading of the liturgical texts, and as much as this *Sisterbook* served as a literary document reflecting all of their common experiences, it also indicates the degree to which the sisters were involved in reading out loud those texts and performing them through chanting the antiphone: "Einez nahtes da lasen sie metin mit einander: da lasen sie als andehtlich daz sie nimmer auf gesahen" (18; one night they were reading the matins together, and they read with so much devotion that they never looked up).

In an interesting twist of the interaction between author and contributors, between reader and listeners, between one sister and the entire congregation, we also witness the inclusion of poetry that had arisen in one of the mystics: "In dez do sie in den noten waz und sie floch und ir eren vorht, do piltten sich dise wort in ir hertz" (22; once when she was in an emergency and had to flee, fearing for her honor, the following words formed in her heart), followed by the verses. This suggests that the *Sisterbook* emerges not only as a record book of mystical visions and revelations, but it also proves to be a literary repository and a medium for many of the fellow-sisters to develop and record their own poetic and narrative compositions, their oral accounts, and the chronicle of the entire convent. Above all, however, the mystical accounts gain primary attention, insofar as they are shared with the entire convent, as reflected here in the *Sisterbook*: "Do fragt sie, ob siz gesagen oder verswigen solt? Da sprach sie: 'Du solt ez gesagen. Ich bin dar umb her wider kumen, daz unsers herren ere do von gelobt werd" (23; then she

asked whether she should talk or keep it secret. She said: 'you should say it. I have come back with the intention to make sure that the honor of Our Lord will be praised). In a number of cases, however, the convent women who had turned to writing because of their mystical experience tried hard to conceal it from their fellow sisters, until they were eventually forced or inspired to reveal it to the others, some of whom then copied it down on their behalf.⁹¹

We also observe this phenomenon when an individual nun does not indicate whether she actually wrote down her own vision or whether it was recorded by another person. Shortly before Guet von Ditenhofen's death, she experienced an encounter with the Godhead as a child: "Und vor irm tod spilt unser herre in einez kleinen kindelins weise vor ir und gelobt ir, er wolt ir gutlich tuen. Dar nach starb sie kurtzlichen" (24; before her death Our Lord played, in the vein of a little child, in front of her and pledged her to do good to her. Shortly thereafter she died). Obviously, the community of nuns enjoyed a close communication among each other, regularly exchanging their experiences, and in this sense it would not have mattered whether one person actually wrote down or only related her revelations to another nun who in turn then wrote down what she had heard, which then became the basic material for the author or compiler of this *Sisterbook*. This even pertained to ghostly meetings with spirits, such as when Mechthilt von Neitstein returned to her fellow-sisters after her death: "Do kom sie nach dem tode her wider und sprach: ir het got unmezzigen lon dar umb geben daz sie dem convent als getrev wer gewesen" (25; she returned after her death and said: God had given her immeasurable reward for having been so loyal to the convent).⁹²

In many cases the mystical experience was recorded through secondary sources, but since the entire community was interested in the visions, and since many of the visionaries experienced them only shortly before their death, that is, at a time when they were probably already too frail to write by themselves, we may conclude that the oral account and its transformation into a written record intimately played hand in hand, involving the entire congregation. Over and over again we hear of special visions which the nuns witnessed just a short time before they passed away, and since they never died alone,⁹³ instead were always surrounded by helping sisters, their visions were immediately recorded and later

⁹¹ Jansen, *Die Texte des Kirchberg-Corpus*, 103.

⁹² For medieval belief in ghosts and spirits, see Aline G. Hornaday, "Visitors from Another Space: The Medieval Revenant as Foreigner," *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 71–95.

⁹³ Johannes Grabmayer, "Didaxe und Paränese in der mittelalterlichen Offenbarungsliteratur: Vier Beispiele aus der südwestdeutschen Chronistik des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts," *du guoter tôt. Sterben im Mittelalter. Ideal und Realität. Akten der Akademie Friesach "Stadt und Kultur im Mittelalter" Friesach (Kärnten)*, 19.–23. September 1994, ed. Markus J. Wenninger. Schriftenreihe der Akademie Friesach, 3 (Klagenfurt: Wieser Verlag, 1998), 273–90.

added to the *Sisterbook*: “Do dise swester Agnes an irn tot kom, do horten zwo swester daz aller suzest saitenspil daz ie gehort wart in den luften ob ir: in dem verschieet si mit einem rihtigen ende” (42; when Sister Agnes approached her death, two other sisters perceived in the air above her the sweetest play of a string instrument which they had ever heard).

The *Engeltal Büchlein von der Genaden Überlast* abruptly comes to an end without any further references to the actual writing process, but the overall evidence is strong enough to support the claim that the mystical experiences provided the key instrument for all fellow-sisters in the convent to participate in the communal writing process, whether as sources or witnesses, as recorders or collaborators.

Even when we are not clearly informed about the information flow and the contributions by the individual nuns, each *Sisterbook* demonstrates that the entire convent shared the interest in the mystical visions and was proud of those members who were graced with God’s presence. As Anna von Münzingen indicates at the end of her compilation (1418): “Ir söllet wissen, das wir kume den halben teile haben geschriben die gnode, die Gott den swesteren an hett getan, wann do man das buoch schreib, do wz der swesteren an der merteile tot, die es alles wisseten”⁹⁴ (you need to know that we have written hardly about half of the grace which God bestowed upon the sisters. When this book was written, the majority of the sisters who had known all about it was already dead). Anna reveals, however, that there were also problematic situations, as not all sisters were capable or willing to share their experiences, and if they did not write them down, their visions could be lost to the subsequent generation of nuns.

VII. Elisabeth Stagel

As much as Anna volunteered to serve as the convent’s mouthpiece and to collect all of their accounts in this one *Sisterbook*, Elisabeth Stagel performed the same duty in her *Töss Sisterbook*.⁹⁵ But the latter also complained about the fundamental problem that not every sister was diligent enough to write down her experiences or failed to dictate them, meaning that Elisabeth could not complete her task as desired: “darum hat er sich unsren schwestren gar dik und fil mit hohen und wunderlichen offenbarungen erzaiget, das uns laider engangen ist untz an gar

⁹⁴ “Die Chronik der Anna von Munzingen. Nach der ältesten Abschrift mit Einleitung und Beilagen,” ed. J. König. *Freiburger Diözesan Archiv* 13 (1880): 129–236; here 189; quoted from Jaron Lewis, *By Women, for Women, about Women* (Microfiche).

⁹⁵ *Das Leben der Schwestern zu Töss beschrieben von Elsbet Stagel, samt der Vorrede des Johannes Meyer und dem Leben der Prinzessin Elisabeth von Ungarn*, ed. Ferdinand Vetter. *Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters*, 6 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1906); here quoted from Jaron Lewis, *By Women, for Women, about Women* (Microfiche).

wenig, als uns aigenlich dunket das es nach der rechten warheit wer" (16; for that reason He revealed Himself to our sisters many times and through many miracles, of which only little has come down to us, contrary to how it really had been).

The reason for this negligence appears to be quite obvious—they had been too deeply involved with the Godhead to think about writing down each other's mystical experiences "das sy nit gedacht von ainer andren zeschriben" (16; she did not even think of writing about another one). Nevertheless, Elisabeth did not have to rely entirely on hearsay, instead she also had available many written sources and could truly work as a compiler: "Das wir aber hie geschriben habent, das ist als wir es unser eltren hortent vor uns sagen und och von in ain tail geschriben was" (16; all that we have written down here we have heard from our older sisters, and in part it had been written down by them).⁹⁶ She is also aware of how her book will be received by others, as she emphasizes in her general warning: "Wer nun dis buochly hoer lessen, der sol nit nach sinem aigenen sin verkeren das dar an geschriben stat" (16; whoever will hear this book being read should not change its content according to her own mind). At the same time Elisabeth openly admits that she was not even able to incorporate every report that she had received: "Wir habent an disem buoch vil abgelassen, das doch guot zuo hoerent wer. Och haben wir etwas hie an geschriben das klain schinet; aber es ist etwenn vor Gott groesser das da klain schinet, denn das vil gross schinet" (16; we have left out much in this book which would have been worthwhile to listen to. We have also written down things that seem to be of minor importance, but many things that seem little are great before God).

Ostensibly, most mystically inspired nuns wanted to be part of the book that Elisabeth composed, but she quickly had realized the need to proceed quite carefully not to exceed the limits of her own means in writing the text. In many cases the fellow-sisters were just too old to write anymore and asked Elisabeth for help: "Do sy nun als fast baidi von alter und krankhait begund abnemen, do bat sy die saelgen schwester Elsbeten Staglinum, die dis ales von ir schraib, so sy saechi das sy sich ienen nider liessi an ir gemach ald mit iement zuo red kem, das nit von Got wer, das sy sy denn maneti" (93; when she began to fade fast because of old age and sickness, she asked the holy sister Elsbet Staglinum who copied everything down what she said that she should admonish her when she would find her talking with someone in her room instead of with God).

Occasionally we almost become eye-witnesses of how the actual recording took place, such as in the case of the *Weiler Sisterbook*.⁹⁷ A group of nuns went to a

⁹⁶ Jansen, *Die Texte des Kirchberg-Corpus*, 103–04.

⁹⁷ "Mystisches Leben in dem Dominikanerinnenkloster Weiler bei Eßlingen im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert," ed. Karl Bihlmeyer. *Württembergische Vierteljahresschrift für Landesgeschichte* n.s. [new series] 25 (1916): 61–93; here 76; quoted from Jaron Lewis, *By Women, for Women, about Women* (Microfiche).

fellow-sister whom they trusted as a person filled with God's grace, and asked her, for consolation, and were told the following:

ja, ich wil ewch eins sagen. An einem morgen frü ging ich in den chor da sah ich vor dem altar sten ein grünen blüenden pawm, der waz vol edeler frucht. Da ward mein hertz und sin auf gezogen und war mir zu versten geben, daz der pawm wer das crewtz und sein frucht wer der leichnam und das plut unsers herren; und ward mein hertz wunderlich geziret mit der süßikeit der frucht, als geschriben stet: ascendam ad palmam et aprehendam fructus eias" (76)

[yes, I will tell you something. One early morning I went to the choir and saw in front of the altar a green, blooming tree covered with wonderful fruit. Then my heart and mind were enraptured and I was given to understand that the tree represented the cross and the fruit were the body and the blood of Our Lord. My heart was marvellously enriched with the sweetness of the fruit, as it is written: climb up the palm tree and take his fruit.]

This and many similar exchanges form the basis of this book, as we hear at the conclusion once again: "Von disen und noch von vil andern heiligen swestern, die hie nit genennet sein, möcht man vil schreyben von schönen genaden, dy in got tet" (85; one could write about the things done by God to these and many other holy sisters who are not mentioned here). The scribe, however, saw herself incapable of recording all visions, especially as those sisters who were still alive and not yet approaching old age preferred to keep their visions to themselves, or at least to the convent: "dy noch bey uns und under uns sein, auch vil möcht schreyben; sy wöllen aber iren willen dar zu nit geben, daz man ihtz von yn schreib, die weil sie leben" (85; one could write about many who are still among us, but they do not want to agree to this while they are still alive). Whereas older mystical scholarship had assumed that a major generational distance separated these convent writers from their older sisters who had experienced these mystical visions, we know by now, as Sabine Jansen has demonstrated, that the *Sisterbook* was the result of collective writing efforts, even when the actual 'author' might have already passed away, as in most cases the mystic and the writer were of similar age and closely collaborated to create the written account.⁹⁸

VIII. Conclusion

A number of conclusions can be drawn from our observations regarding late-medieval women's convents and their level of, interest in, and use of literacy. Obviously, throughout the entire Middle Ages, many convents were some of the

⁹⁸ Jansen, *Die Texte des Kirchberg-Corpus*, 105–07.

most influential centers of learning, culture, and literature, though they experienced many different periods of intellectual growth and decline.⁹⁹ So it does not come as a surprise that these *Sisterbooks* were produced in such large numbers particularly in these Dominican convents where traditionally intellectual education was strongly supported. In Jaron Lewis's words, "the desire for learning is spiritually motivated, that is, learning is valued because it can enhance devotion."¹⁰⁰ But the nuns who became active as authors were not simply the few outstanding figures within their communities, rather they assumed the crucial function of collecting, recording, and representing all their fellow-sisters who had experienced a mystical vision. In other words, the mystical experience transformed the entire convent into a community of authors who collectively had grasped the idea that the written word carries spiritual and cultural meaning and could give them all as a group a sense of power. As Anne Bollmann and Nikolaus Staubach observe with respect to the *Schwesternbuch* of the St. Agnus Convent in Emmerich (completed in 1493)—though here we deal more with biographical texts and less with mystical literature—

Die Besonderheit des von ihr gewählten Werktyps lag vielmehr in der Verbindung und synergetischen Steigerung der Gattungsfunktionen von Hagiographie und geistlichem Exerzitium, Memorialzeugnis und Klosterhistoriographie. Denn das Schwesternbuch bietet nicht eine Sammlung entrückter, idealer und unerreichbar scheinender Tugendmustern sondern die konkreten Lebensläufe von Angehörigen einer geistlichen Gemeinschaft, die in ihnen die Geschichte ihres eigenen Hauses und die Erinnerung an ihre Ursprünge, Fortschritte und Prüfungen vor Augen hat.¹⁰¹

[The peculiar character of the genre chosen by her was determined by the combination and synergetical increase of the generic functions of hagiography, spiritual exercises, memorial, and monastic historiography. The sisterbook does not offer a collection of enraptured, ideal, and seemingly unrealizable models of virtues, but instead the concrete biographies of the members of a spiritual community through which the history of their own house and the memory of their origins, progression, and challenges are preserved.]

Most remarkably, the author demonstrates an astonishing degree of humbleness, but she does not eliminate herself completely and presents herself rather straightforwardly: "Ende want ick sijmpel ende onge- /leert bijn, soe begeer ic, dat die gheen, die dat leesen of hoeren, niet en versmaeden, mer dat si aen sien dat leuen ende die dochden der gheenre, die in desen boeck gheschreuen sijn" (And

⁹⁹ William A. Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order*. Vol. 1: *Origins and Growth to 1500*; Vol. 2: *Intellectual and Cultural Life to 1500* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1966/1973), Vol. 2, 206–07.

¹⁰⁰ Jaron Lewis, *By Women, for Women, about Women*, 272.

¹⁰¹ *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich*, ed. Anne Bollmann and Nikolaus Staubach (Emmerich: Emmericher Geschichtsverein, 1998), 17.

because I am simple and unlearned, I request that those who will read or listen to this text do not despise it, and that they consider the lives and the virtues of those about whom this book reports).¹⁰² Nevertheless, the author clearly signals her full confidence in having composed a worthwhile literary collection when she writes in her epilogue:

Ende om dattet nijemant en sal verdrieten auermids mennichuoldiger lancheit, soe heb ic van voellen een wennich genamen ende dat mijt slechten corten worden bij een ghesat nae mynnen sijmpelen eenuoldigen verstande. Mer ic habe dat God nae mij een aender sal verwecken die dat verbeteren sal. Ic woste wael dat ic daer vol te onnutte toe was, mer want ic sach, dattet van nijemant gedaen en wart, soe heuet mij die liefde Gades ende die mynne mynre mede susteren daer toe gebracht. Ic hap dat ic anders niet en heb geschreuen dan voer God waer en is, ende mij auermijds waerachtigen geloeffelicken susteren gesacht is.

[And so that nobody will feel discomfort with my verbosity, I have selected a little from the entire text and summarized it in a simplified manner in accordance with my limited understanding. But I hope that God will raise someone after me who will improve the work. I knew well that I was not quite competent for this task, but because I noticed that nobody was accepting this obligation, I was propelled by the love of God and the affection of my fellow sisters to carry it out myself. I hope that I have not written anything else but what will be held true before God and what my beloved sisters have truly told me.]

We can, however, add another observation pertaining to the literary, discursive quality of this corpus of texts and variants of this genre, such as the *Sisterbook* of St. Emmeran. The Southwestern *Sisterbooks*, with their common mystical orientation, demonstrate in unusual clarity the intimate relationship between these religious revelations and the writing process, which in turn was strongly supported by intensive oral exchanges. More than ever before, it seems, the written word emerges as a crucial catalyst for entire communities to realize their ultimate purpose, the encounter with the Godhead in the mystical moment of spiritual reunion (*unio mystica*). Each individual nun who was fortunate enough to receive such a revelation immediately became crucially important for all other fellow-sisters as they provided deeply desired information, confirmation, and hope for the other nuns who either might not have had experienced a vision or had not received one for a long time. Each person who claimed such a vision was deeply admired, questioned, and observed by all other sisters. The person, however, who eventually wrote down the vision was only one in a long chain of participants in this convent communication, hence the *Sisterbook* grew into the central icon of the entire congregation of nuns.¹⁰³

¹⁰² *Schwesternbuch und Statuten*, 38.

¹⁰³ For additional examples of religious women writers, especially twelfth- and thirteenth-century

The writing itself complemented, but certainly did not substitute for, the oral accounts, but since many nuns who had experienced mysticism passed away without having recorded all their visions, the *Sisterbook* assumed the function of serving as the decisive memorial book and repository of the collective mystical experience.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, at closer analysis the various *Sisterbooks* prove to be a conglomerate of various genres: chronicle, mystical discourse, collection of biographies, and meditative medium, not to forget the memorial and religious tribute to nuns who had been graced with visions. From a religious and political perspective Anne Winston-Allen has identified the fifteenth-century representatives of this genre as decisive catalysts for convent women to determine their own lives and to establish their own role in the broad discourse concerning the reform of monastic orders. "As these new voices from the eve of the Reformation demonstrate, the past changes; it looks different with women sharing center stage."¹⁰⁵

For our purpose, we are now in an ideal position to claim these *Sisterbooks* as remarkable, highly powerful, eloquent, certainly literary, and in a way also learned documents by a large group of late-medieval women writers, which powerfully confirms, from a late-medieval German perspective, Kate Greenspan's claim: "over the course of the last fifteen years we have recovered so many spiritual autobiographies by medieval religious women that the notion of their 'exceptionality' has become less and less useful."¹⁰⁶

When medieval women were given an opportunity to acquire learning, they proved to be highly adapt, receptive, creative, and intellectually capable.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps Martin Luther had a uncannily clear understanding of this phenomenon; hence his adamant approach in closing convents and forcing women to return to their families, or to marry. This was his failed effort to stem the flood of women's

convent women creating psalters, see Jürgen Wolf, "vrowen phlegene ze lesene: Beobachtungen zur Typik von Büchern und Texten für Frauen," *Text und Text in lateinischer und volkssprachiger Überlieferung des Mittelalters. Freiburger Kolloquium 2004*. Together with Wolfgang Haubrichs and Klaus Ridder, ed. Eckart Conrad Lutz. *Wolfram-Studien*, XIX (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2006): 169–90.

¹⁰⁴ The parallels to contemporary collections of courtly love poetry, such as the *Große Heidelberger Liederhandschrift* (ms. C), the *Weinberger Liederhandschrift* (ms. A), and the *Kleine Heidelberger Liederhandschrift* (ms. B), are quite significant. Whereas the nuns took measures to preserve the collective memory of many mystical experiences in their convents, the collectors of the *minnesongs* were equally concerned with preserving a cultural identity, represented by the poetic words. For convents as essential sites for memory, especially by and for women, see Elisabeth van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe, 900–1200* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 118–20.

¹⁰⁵ Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, 238.

¹⁰⁶ Kate Greenspan, "Autohagiography and Medieval Women's Spiritual Autobiography," *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1996), 216–36; here 216–17.

¹⁰⁷ Eva Schlotheuber, "Die Verwendung von Sprichwörtern," 16–18.

literature, and as the *Sisterbooks* indicate, this flood was not a trickle, not even in the late Middle Ages. Of course, sixteenth-century women's writing represents an entirely different corpus and confronts us with a whole host of additional problems and issues, nevertheless the challenges constituted by the *Sisterbooks* powerfully indicate how much new perspectives toward women's writing from a postmodern position promise to unearth a much broader and much more extensive discourse irrespective of the gender divide and the discrepancy of power control.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ For a medieval perspective, see Ursula Peters, "Frauenliteratur im Mittelalter? Überlegungen zur Trobairitzpoesie, zur Frauenmystik und zur feministischen Literaturbetrachtung," eadem, *Von der Sozialgeschichte zur Kulturwissenschaft: Aufsätze 1973–2000*, ed. Susanne Bürkle, Lorenz Deutsch, and Timo Reuvekamp-Felber (Tübingen and Basel: Francke, 2004; orig. 1988), 107–30; for a Reformation perspective, see Albrecht Classen, "Die 'Querelle des femmes' im 16. Jahrhundert im Kontext des theologischen Gelehrtenstreits. Die literarischen Beiträge von Argula von Grumbach und Anna Ovena Hoyers," *Wirkendes Wort* 50, 2 (2000): 189–213. For a more traditional approach to women's writing in the early-modern period, see Barbara Becker-Cantarino, *Der lange Weg zur Mündigkeit*, 67–110.

Chapter Eight

Margery Kempe as a Writer: A Woman's Voice in the Mystical and Literary Discourse

I. The European Perspective: Margery Kempe

Much as we can now claim that the Southwest German Dominican *Sisterbooks* represent significant documents of medieval women's literature, we can argue along the same lines regarding other mystical texts. While these have often been studied in light of women's roles in the Middle Ages, and as expressions of visionary experiences, hence from a theological, social, and even political perspective, here I suggest to turn to a text that has been discussed more discursively than many others, the fifteenth-century *Book* by the fairly uneducated, yet enormously energetic, forceful, and determined, perhaps even visionary Margery Kempe. There is no doubt that Mechthild von Magdeburg's *Flowing Light of the Godhead* (thirteenth century) represents a literary masterpiece, though from a highly individualistic point of view.¹ The various treatises, letters, hymns, and other texts by Hildegard von Bingen today enjoy canonical status,² and the same can be claimed for St. Catherine of Siena, Bridget of Sweden, Teresa of Avila, and many others.³ But what are we to make of Margery Kempe's text, which at first sight seems just as marginal to the literary standards and norms of her time as the *Sisterbooks*? By subjecting her *Book* to close literary-historical analysis, we will gain powerful access to a female voice and establish criteria of medieval female literacy that promise to yield new perspectives for the future study of medieval women's literature at large.

¹ Now see Sara S. Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

² See, for instance, Maud Burnett McNerney, *Hildegard of Bingen. A Book of Essays*, ed. Maud Burnett McNerney. Garland Medieval Casebooks (New York and London: Garland, 1998); see also the chapter on Hildegard and Marie de France in this book.

³ Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

II. Mysticism and Autobiography

Fundamental questions concerning Margery Kempe's mystical account in her *Book* still await critical examination, although her text, first discovered in 1934 in the possession of the old Catholic family, the Butler-Bowdons, has been the object of close investigations ever since.⁴ After all, here we come across the first autobiography in the English language, an autobiography written (dictated) by a woman who claims mystical visions, challenges the various male authorities, goes traveling to all the major pilgrimage sites (Rome, Jerusalem, Santiago de Compostella), openly discusses female sexuality, and powerfully utilizes the literary discourse to establish a religious identity. But did she actually compose her text, or was she nothing but an instrument in the hands of various scribes who clearly indicate that they wrote down her account on Margery's behalf?⁵ What value can we attribute to her *Book* as a source for mental-historical investigation, and what significance as a contribution to the literary discourse of her time? Would it be enough to identify her writing as autobiographical-mystical and as the result of plain devotional piety, or did it actually meet specific requirements of a literary text in the traditional sense of the word? If it belongs to late-medieval English literature, why have scholars been so hesitant to place it in any kind of significant proximity to the writings of her forerunners and contemporaries, such as the *Pearl*-poet, Geoffrey Chaucer, Thomas Hoccleve, and John Lydgate? To point out simply the differences in intentions, world view, and genre between her text and those of her contemporaries would not be satisfactory, especially as medieval literature did not know such clear demarcations between religious and secular texts, and life at court was not necessarily purely worldly, as most courtly romances, for instance, indicate unmistakably.⁶

Undoubtedly, Margery published only one of the many mystical texts created during the Middle Ages, some of which enjoyed unparalleled success (e.g., Hildegard von Bingen, Brigit of Sweden, Catherine of Siena), whereas others were rejected as heretical and condemned because a woman had composed them and seriously challenged the church authorities in her religious teachings (Marguerite Porete).⁷ Does Margery, however, truly count as a fully-fledged mystic, or was her

⁴ See J. McCann, "The Book of Margery Kempe," *Dublin Review* 200 (1937): 103–16; Edmund Colledge, "Margery Kempe," *Pre-Reformation English Spirituality*, ed. and introd. James Walsh S.J. (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 1966), 210–23; here 210–11; Verena E. Neuburger, *Margery Kempe. A Study in Early English Feminism*. European University Studies, Series 14: Anglo-Saxon Language and Literature, 278 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), 51–52.

⁵ J. C. Hirsh, "Author and Scribe in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *Medium Aevum* 44 (1975): 145–50.

⁶ *Geistliches in Weltlicher und Weltliches in geistlicher Literatur des Mittelalters*, ed. Christoph Huber, Burghart Wachinger, and Hans-Joachim Ziegeler (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000).

⁷ See Hope Emily Allen, "Prefatory Note," Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*. The Text from

Book the result of simple-minded devout piety and of a sincere interest to produce a religious text for her contemporaries' spiritual instruction? All these questions are not intended to reveal complete uncertainty about this text, instead they should sensitize us to the intriguing quality and complexity of her autobiography, forcing us to revisit the text and to examine it from ever new perspectives.⁸

As B. A. Windeatt points out, "we cannot claim Margery's *Book* to be the autobiography of a great mystic—the quality of her mystical experience prevents this—but it remains one of the most immediate 'Lives' of the period."⁹ Nicholas Watson strongly encourages us to view Kempe's account, along with contemporary English mystical literature (Richard Rolle [d. 1349], Walter Hilton [d. 1396], Julian of Norwich [d. after 1415], and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*), in close proximity to secular literature. This task, however, still remains to be carried out despite his preliminary efforts to contextualize the *Book*. Whereas Watson closely follows the arguments of the mystical authors in detail, ultimately he neglects to relate them to the statements by secular writers and to examine the actual literary quality of Margery's *Book*.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it seems most appropriate to adopt his thesis "that a closer attention to the issues common to works thought of as mystical and works that are not shows the value of integrating mystics scholarship with the rest of literary history."¹¹ This critical issue, however, remains a considerable desideratum despite much research on Margery's *Book*, perhaps because more pressing aspects concerning her mysticism, her role as a female writer, as an avid traveler to many different pilgrimage sites, and questions pertaining to the issue of literacy versus orality in her text have taken precedence.¹²

Certainly, many medievalists have recognized Kempe's writing as unique in its literary style, religious intent, and narrative structure, and have also described it

the Unique Ms. Owned by Colonel W. Butler-Bowdon. Vol. I, ed. with introd. and Glossary by Sanford Brown Meech. Early English Text Society, Original Series, 212 (1940; London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1960), lix.

⁸ Sandra J. McEntire, "Introduction," *Margery Kempe. A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1468 (New York and London: Garland, 1992), x: "Indeed, 'most controversial' is the only issue about which critics agree."

⁹ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, transl. B. A. Windeatt (London: Penguin, 1985), 23.

¹⁰ Nicholas Watson, "The Middle English Mystics," *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 539–65; here 564–65.

¹¹ Watson, "The Middle English Mystics," 540.

¹² James P. Helfers, "The Mystic as Pilgrim: Margery Kempe and the Tradition of Nonfictional Travel Narrative," *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 13 (1992): 25–45; here 27: "At least part of her importance in the history of travel narratives lies in the way her vocations as mystic and pilgrim intimately relate, and the way she uses and modifies conventions of and attitudes toward pilgrimage to validate her own behavior." And, 45: "We see in *The Book of Margery Kempe* a microcosm of the shift in the image of pilgrimage, in which the outward journey becomes less of a necessity than the inward one." See also Albrecht Classen, "Die Mystikerin als peregrina. Margery Kempe: Reisende in corpore – Reisende in spiritu," *Studies in Spirituality* 5 (1995): 27–145.

as a highly remarkable document of religious experience, reflecting a woman's personal self-awareness in literary form.¹³ Nevertheless, we are still far away from fully understanding and properly evaluating the importance of Kempe's actual discourse both for medieval women's history and late-medieval English literature.¹⁴ The complex nature of her *Book* offers many opportunities to explore in greater details the cultural, intellectual, religious, and also political position enjoyed by women in the late Middle Ages insofar as Kempe does not easily comply with standard expectations established by the traditional major medieval writers and probably would have protested herself against any identification as a literary author. After all, her *Book* represents a highly idiosyncratic approach to metaphysical and physical reality, baffling most of her social environment, and has continued to puzzle modern readers.¹⁵ To some extent Kempe proves to be unique in the composition of her work because of its highly autobiographical nature, combined with the obvious collaboration with the scribe, the political and theological issues, and her incessant attempts to achieve mystical union with the Godhead. But her *Book* reveals numerous parallels with the Southwest German *Sisterbooks* and with Hildegard von Bingen's mystical visions in that we gain a glimpse into the actual writing process and learn much about her personal struggles against the church authorities. Moreover, she wrote her text in the vernacular, and faced severe opposition from the church hierarchy, both in England and abroad, particularly when she crossed Germany on her way to Jerusalem, and when she journeyed to Danzig (Gdansk) in present-day Poland. Despite severe opposition both from her own family, especially her husband, and from the clerics, Margery succeeded in making her voice heard and in addressing posterity through her *Book*. In this sense she shares much interest in her own self as a writer with the Hungarian-German chambermaid, Helene Kottanner, whom I will discuss in the eighth chapter. By examining the numerous narrative voices in her *Book*, we will gain a new understanding of what constituted medieval women's literature in its social-political, and economic context.

¹³ Here I will refer to her both by her first and by her last name for variety sake. Both forms of address are equally valid, particularly in the late-medieval context.

¹⁴ Clarissa W. Atkinson, *"This Creature": A Study of the Book of Margery Kempe*. Diss. Ph.D. Boston College, 1979, offers both an impressive historical survey of Kempe-research and a detailed analysis of Kempe's *Book*. Her investigation, however, is strictly historical and theological in nature and does not take into account that the *Book* also represents an outstanding contribution to fifteenth-century English literature.

¹⁵ Robert Karl Stone, *Middle English Prose Style. Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), identifies her *Book* as a true literary enterprise.

III. Kempe in Her Social Context

Despite much hostility to which Kempe was subjected as a result of her unexplainable and profuse weeping, which led many contemporaries to identify her as a Lollard, her mystical "visions" obviously also attracted considerable interest and her religious "performance" aroused both major curiosity and irritation, especially as it evoked, as Denis Renevey now observes, a "hermeneutic process."¹⁶ In B. A. Windeatt's words, "we hear recorded, however tidied, much of the accent of an authentic voice of a medieval Englishwoman of unforgettable character, undeniable courage and unparalleled experience."¹⁷ And Liliana Sikorska emphasizes that "Margery represents what McMurray Gibbson (1989) calls the theater of devotion, and indeed many of her meditations are exactly like medieval spectacles."¹⁸

As we can tell from her own introductory words, Margery faced extreme difficulties in finding adequate help in producing her *Book* as people accused her of many different shortcomings and especially blamed her for transgressions with respect to the teachings of the Catholic Church. It is certainly correct to identify her autobiographical writing as "unique in the nature and richness of the testimony it gives as a construction of a town dweller's mentality in medieval England."¹⁹ Other scholars have focused on issues such as gender roles, religious experiences, and the individual identity as reflected by Kempe.²⁰ Moreover, some

¹⁶ Denis Renevey, "Margery's Performing Body: The Translation of Late Medieval Discursive Religious Practices," *Writing Religious Women. Female Spirituality and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, ed. Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 197–216; here 198. For a parallel case among the Beguines in the Low Countries, see Joanna E. Ziegler, "Elisabeth of Spalbeek's Ecstasy: The Southern Low Countries Do Matter," *The Texture of Society: Medieval Women in the Southern Low Countries*, ed. Ellen E. Kittell and Mary A. Suydam. *The New Middle Ages* (New York, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 181–202; here 188: "Elisabeth was the quintessential performer—actor, dancer, and seer, all at once—and her mystical activities comprised a theatrical event, or, . . . it was 'performance art.'"

¹⁷ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, transl. B. A. Windeatt, 10.

¹⁸ Liliana Sikorska, *Voices Against Silence: Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. A Feminist Approach to Language* (Poznań: Motwix, 1996), 157.

¹⁹ For a detailed discussion of the relationship between Margery and her amanuenses, see the introductory notes by Hope Emily Allen in *The Book of Margery Kempe, 1400/1400*, vii–xi; Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World. The Medieval World* (London, New York, et al.: Longman, 2002), 3.

²⁰ Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim. The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), 129–56, emphasizes, above all, Margery's "affective piety." See also J. C. Hirsch, *The Revelations of Margery Kempe. Paramystical Practices in Late Medieval England* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989); Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*. *New Cultural Studies Series* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 227, underscores the "interrelationship of bodies, speech, discourse, and books . . . Their interrelationship depends upon

literary historians have analyzed the social and political statements hidden in her *Book*, and examined the cultural and religious milieu in which Margery lived.²¹ Indeed, in her narrative account the mystic reflects upon many aspects typical of her time, and provides insight into religious practices, fears, belief systems, pilgrimages, conflicts within her society and between various peoples. Furthermore, the author poignantly illustrates common practices of religious devotion in her fifteenth-century world, which certainly extended far beyond the limits of Lynne, Norfolk, and even England, considering her many pilgrimages to holy sites both on the continent and as far away as Palestine.²² As Anthony Goodman suggests, Kempe “intended to win over detractors and establish there the transcendent nature of her devotion. . . . It is pro-urban, not written in the genre of denunciation of cities, echoing Old Testament prophecies, or paralleling classical praise of country living.”²³

According to Timea K. Szell, Margery desired “to be socially accepted either by persuading the public (and herself) of her authenticity or by succumbing fully to the ‘superego’ (i.e., the dictates of her patriarchal cultural context), on the one hand, *and*, on the other, to be publicly humiliated or punished for her own perceived inability to meet society’s (and her own superego’s) expectations.”²⁴ The obvious contradictions do not need any confirmations, justifications, and explanations here, especially as we can resort to Richard Kieckhefer’s identification of Margery’s text as “autohagiography,” a genre which often lacks internal and external discourse structures.²⁵ Do we indeed encounter a form of “artlessness,” as more recent critics have described her literary style,²⁶ or a female

the ideological framework of medieval culture, from its theory of the complicity of the feminine and the flesh, to its prescriptions for the female religious, to its modes of literary and theological discourse.” See also Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); the contributors to *Margery Kempe. A Book of Essays*, ed. by Sandra J. McEntire, 1992, address Kempe’s role as a woman within her society, her work, and her social context within the world.

²¹ Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World*, 13; 155.

²² Thomas William Coleman, *English Mystics of the Fourteenth Century* (1938; Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971), 156; Ewald Standop and Edgar Mertner, *Englische Literaturgeschichte. Alt- und mittellenglische Literatur* (Heidelberg: Quelle und Meyer, 1967), 84.

²³ Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World*, 206.

²⁴ Timea K. Szell, “From Woe to Weal and Weal to Woe: Notes on the Structure of *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” *Margery Kempe. A Book of Essays*, 73–91; here 75.

²⁵ Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 6; see also Szell, “From Woe to Weal,” 78.

²⁶ Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), chapter 3; Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translation of the Flesh*, chapter 3; Janel M. Mueller, “Autobiography of a New ‘Creatur’: Female Spirituality, Selfhood, and Authorship in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” *Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 155–72; also in *The Female*

type of hysteria manifested in Kempe's devotional writing which then resulted in her allegedly disorganized writing, as older scholarship suggested?²⁷ We can, however, certainly agree with Liliana Sikorska, who, in her feminist study of Kempe's work, *Voices Against Silence*, suggests: "Throughout the whole text Margery seems to lack the ability to distinguish between the literal and the abstract. In her mind everything is real and her language of desire reflects that inability."²⁸ Moreover, as Sikorska rightly suggests, "Her style, circular and repetitious, might be termed as fluid It is the fluidity of style, the detailed description and the sensitivity toward colors and smells, that mark the female style. In these ways Margery approaches the idea of *l'écriture féminine*, and writes her Self through her body."²⁹

Certainly, Kempe openly admits that she did not employ any particular organizational structure in the composition of her *Book*, as she dictated her text "lych as þe mater cam to þe creatur in mend . . . for it was so long er it was wretyn þat sche had for-getyn þe tyme & þe ordyr whan thyngys befellyn. And perfor sche dede no þing wryten but þat sche knew ryght wel for very trewth" (5; "just as the matter came to this creature's mind . . . for it was so long before it was written that she had forgotten the time and the order when things occurred. And therefore she had nothing written but what she well knew to be indeed the truth," 36–37).³⁰ In clear opposition to many critics, Lynn Staley goes so far as to praise Kempe for achieving a number of different goals through her literary enterprise: "Kempe can speak of the unspeakable, can raise issues best left alone, can detail the process by which Margery threatens a community that exacts a heavy price for nonconformity, and can finally question the very process by which we invest authority in communal bodies. Kempe uses her scribe at once to contain the effect and to underline the urgency of questions she poses through Margery and her extraordinary life."³¹ But compared with many other medieval mystics, she seems to fall into quite a different category as her experiences of the Godhead find their best expression in her tears and constant sobbing. These scenes, in turn, are intriguingly couched in pragmatic accounts of her daily life, her travels, her contacts with neighbors, clerics, and the upper Church authorities. This

Autograph. Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century, ed. Domna C. Stanton (1984; Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 63–77.

²⁷ Maureen Fries, "Margery Kempe," *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*. Fourteen Original Essays edited by Paul E. Szarmach (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984), 217–35; here 227; Edmund Colledge, "Margery Kempe," 210; for a comprehensive overview of older scholarship focused on the hysteria thesis, see Clarissa Atkinson, "This Creature."

²⁸ Sikorska, *Voices Against Silence*, 1996, 167.

²⁹ Sikorska, *Voices Against Silence*, 172.

³⁰ Quoted from Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Vol. I, 1940; see also the reprint from 1961.

³¹ Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, 38.

phenomenon has led many scholars primarily to praise her because of her autobiographical and transgressive self-presentation, but not for her 'true' mystical visions and for her literary accomplishments.³²

IV. Margery Kempe's Literary Voice

These almost contradictory features by themselves deserve our acknowledgment, so the time seems to have come to take another close look at the *Book* and investigate two points of utmost importance: 1. What makes this text to such an interesting extant literary text, if we are willing to accept it as such, even as part of the canon?³³ 2. To what extent did Margery succeed in making her own voice heard as a woman by resorting to the writing process?³⁴ 3. Did her mystical experiences by themselves or the written account, written by male scribes for her, constitute a form of self-affirmation for Margery and give her the status of an author comparable to Julian of Norwich or Richard Rolle, not to speak of Chaucer, Hoccleve, and Lydgate?³⁵ Whereas the current interest seems to be almost exclusively focused on Margery's role as a public figure, as a religious person (mystic), and as a woman,³⁶ all of them viewed in light of her mysticism, the real

³² Some have identified her as nothing but a "minor mystic", see, Hope Emily Allen, in: Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Vol. I., lxi; Rolf Beyer, *Die andere Offenbarung. Mystikerinnen des Mittelalters* (Bergisch Gladbach: G. Lübbe Verlag, 1989), 290.

³³ For a strong argument in favor of Margery's *Book* as a true literary enterprise, see Robert Karl Stone, *Middle English Prose Style*, 1970.

³⁴ For a tentatively positive evaluation of her work, see Fries, "Margery Kempe," 228: "its being the first conscious autobiography in English and not in its mysticism;" cf. Standop and Mertner, *Englische Literaturgeschichte*, 84; William Provost, "The English Religious Enthusiast Margery Kempe," *Medieval Women Writers*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 297–319; here 297.

³⁵ Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 62, correctly underscores that mystical texts basically differ from others as the author conceives the words directly from the Godhead: "The mystic's speech is a desire tied to nothing except the will of God." For the mystical and literary context involving Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, and the anonymous *Stimulus amoris*, see *The Book of Margery Kempe*, transl. B. A. Windeatt, 15–22. Nevertheless, the origin of Chaucer's works and that of Kempe's might not be that far apart, especially if we consider the creative act that lifted both writers to the level of literary artistry that makes them famous even today; see Nicholas Watson, "The Middle English Mystics," 539–45; for a broader overview, see *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1980, 1982; Cambridge: D. S. Brewer: 1984, 1987, 1992). For a new edition of Julian's work, along with extensive commentary, see *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

³⁶ Prudence Allen, R.S.M., *The Concept of Woman*. Vol. II: *The Early Humanist Reformation, 1250–1500* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 464.

question might rather be what constitutes the literary character of her text and how we can defend it against unjustified criticism by those who want to evaluate it according to traditional literary standards and identify her crying fits as conditions by a form of post-natal hysteria, meaning that her performance was nothing but a type of paramysticism.³⁷

Undoubtedly, as Laura Amtower emphasizes: "Margery Kempe's validation of her mystical experiences can only take place through their inscription in a text. The text authorizes her. Yet she retains absolute control over this writing. Though she dictates her story to a scribe, she engages in an act of willful self-construction, even while she seeks to distance herself from the traditional process of self-authoring by labeling her persona as "pis creatur."³⁸ What, however, are we to make of the rather chaotic organization of her text which does not meet standard expectations of traditional courtly literature? Would it be enough to relate her *Book* to the model set up by the so-called "fools of God," and argue that the lack of narrative structure represents the very strength of her quasi-mystical text?³⁹ Lynn Staley, on the other hand, points to the intricate structure of the two prefaces that "serve to locate the text within the series of conventions associated with female sacred biography The *Book* presents itself as a token of communal regard for the spiritual example of Margery herself; if she appears to break away from the community, her break is not so radical as to place her outside it. Rather, she functions as an example of spiritual growth for those who long for increased devotion."⁴⁰ Also, we must not forget the true intention of her *Book*, as it did not

³⁷ John C. Hirsh, *The Revelations of Margery Kempe. Paramystical Practices in Late Medieval England*. Medieval and Renaissance Authors, 10 (Leiden, New York, et al.: E. J. Brill, 1989), 86: "Many of Margery's revelations seem to have sprung from such [paramystical] devotions, and when Christ speaks to her he frequently does so in the intimacy of the church or the oratory, where his voice would be most audible." Hirsh also examines the contemporary religious context relevant for Margery, 87: "she was able to articulate and exemplify a tradition of spirituality that was everywhere about her, though few were prepared to take it to the lengths she did. It may be that the voice she took for Christ's was frequently her own, but her own was schooled in prayer and meditation," See also Richard Lawes, "Psychological Disorder and the Autobiographical Impulse in Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and Thomas Hoccleve," *Writing Religious Women. Female Spirituality and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, ed. Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 217–43; here 232–33.

³⁸ Laurel Amtower, *Engaging Words. The Culture of Reading in the Later Middle Ages*. The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 186; See also Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, 11–12; Sarah Salih, "The Digby Saint Plays and the Book of Margery Kempe," *Gender and Holiness. Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih. Routledge Studies in Medieval Religion and Culture, 1 (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 121–34.

³⁹ Robert Maisonneuve, "Margery Kempe and the Eastern and Western Tradition of the 'Perfect Fools'," *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England. Exeter Symposium 3. Papers read at Dartington Hall, July 1984*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1984), 1–17.

⁴⁰ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Lynn Stanley. Middle English Texts (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 3.

serve for secular entertainment and did not address a secular audience. On the contrary, Margery aimed for spiritual enlightenment and affective piety. "In this form of piety, sentiment was not deplored but actively sought, and the most intimate details were brought forward so that every hearer could participate in the pain and joy of the story."⁴¹

Nevertheless, there are many indications that would justify us to incorporate Kempe's *Book* in the literary canon, although Margery operated in the religious sphere primarily and did not specifically aim for recognition as a literary author.⁴² As the examination of the fifteenth-century manuscript demonstrates, her account was carefully reproduced and prepared as a valuable document, whether it enjoyed a literary or a religious reputation at her time. The manuscript is characterized by a very clean script, contains carefully painted red initials, and shows very few signs of any carelessness.⁴³ As Prudence Allen now suggests, "she was able to use discursive reasoning to defend herself in public situations of interrogation by educated men."⁴⁴ Certainly, according to H. S. Bennett, "[n]o English writer, hitherto, had committed to writing so intimate, revealing and human an account of his life and thoughts."⁴⁵ Moreover, as Spanily convincingly demonstrates, God gave her legitimization to preach;⁴⁶ God gave her reason and knowledge to resist and fight back all public and private criticism.⁴⁷ She needs to make her writing known to the public to fulfill the divine will, transforming herself into God's mouthpiece. It is God's wish that she write it all down, and as a conveyor of His words, Margery assumes the highest possible authority as a writer.⁴⁸

Surprisingly, however, all these interpretations have blinded us to one of the most crucial features of the *Book*, that is, its remarkable literary quality and its function as a mirror of Margery's life-long endeavor to reflect her personal life, her mystical experiences, and her struggle with the Church and local authorities by way of a narrative account. In fact, Margery's writing allows us to probe in

⁴¹ Atkinson, "This Creature," 108.

⁴² Amazingly, some religious scholars still exclude Margery entirely from the canon and disregard her *Book* altogether, see Oliver Davies, *God Within. The Mystical Tradition of Northern Europe*. Foreword by Rowan Williams (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1988); by contrast, Rolf Beyer, *Die andere Offenbarung. Mystikerinnen des Mittelalters* (Bergisch Gladbach: Gustav Lübbe, 1989), 290–92, at least discusses her biography in some detail.

⁴³ These observations are based on an autopsy of the manuscript, Add. 61823, British Library. I would like to thank the British Library for allowing me to examine the manuscript personally.

⁴⁴ Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 476.

⁴⁵ H. S. Bennett, *Six Medieval Men and Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 149.

⁴⁶ Claudia Spanily, *Autorschaft und Geschlechterrolle: Möglichkeiten weiblichen Literatentums im Mittelalter. Tradition – Reform – Innovation*, 5 (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2002), 227.

⁴⁷ Spanily, *Autorschaft und Geschlechterrolle*, 228.

⁴⁸ Spanily, *Autorschaft und Geschlechterrolle*, 229–31.

surprising detail the creative process of a remarkably articulate author who relies on a multitude of discourses and thus makes her own contribution to the literature of her time, but not by closely copying the standard (male) models available to her, but by pursuing her own concept of writing as a form of self-realization and self-empowerment by means of the written and spoken word.⁴⁹

V. The Mystical Experience Refracted Through Discourse

As in the case of practically all mystical writers, Margery's texts have to be approached very carefully particularly because of the role of her male scribes and the fact of her illiteracy cannot be simply disregarded, though both aspects do not need to be overemphasized either.⁵⁰ After all, only few medieval literary texts have come down to us as holographs; instead they are preserved in manuscripts produced by anonymous scribes who worked with copies (of copies). Margery assumes an exceptional role in this regard only because she openly discusses her illiteracy. She explicitly addresses her own shortcomings both in the Proem and in Chapter 89 of Book I, but this modesty topos finds numerous parallels in medieval literature and does not suggest that she was ignorant of the implications regarding the authenticity of her account or that she was not aware of the problems of identifying the true nature of her own voice.⁵¹ Nevertheless, irrespective of the scribes' possible influence on Margery's writing, nothing would suggest that she plays, because of her open admission of having been influenced by many other mystical sources, a less significant role as writer of the first English autobiography than the authors of *Hali Meïðhad*, *Seinte Margarete*, *Sawles Warde*, and *Ancrene Wisse*, not to mention many of her contemporary secular authors.⁵²

⁴⁹ This is the same case with the Hungarian-German author Helene Kottanner, see *The Memoirs of Helene Kottanner (1439–1440)*, transl. from the German with Introduction, Interpretive Essay and Notes by Maya Bijvoet Williamson. Library of Medieval Women (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998), 14. I will discuss her text in the subsequent chapter.

⁵⁰ For a broad discussion of the intricate relationship between the amanuensis and the mystic, see Alexandra Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

⁵¹ Julius Schwietering, *Die Demutsformel mittelhochdeutscher Dichter* (1921; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970). Even powerful Hildegard von Bingen resorted to this rhetorical strategy, which ultimately provided her with the necessary authority to address, for example, famous Bernard of Clairvaux and many leading politicians and Church authorities.

⁵² Deborah S. Ellis, "Margery Kempe's Scribe and the Miraculous Books," *Langland, the Mystics and the Medieval English Religious Tradition. Essays in Honour of S. S. Hussey*, ed. Helen Phillips (Rochester, NY, and Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, Boydell and Brewer, 1990), 161–75; here 161–63; for comparisons, see *Medieval English Prose for Women. Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

Lynn Staley proposes a way out of this dilemma by inviting us to “think of it as a fiction (the first novel?), and hence as the work of a self-conscious author, Kempe, who employed a character called Margery for as many and as varied purposes as Chaucer used Geoffrey throughout his poetry or as Langland used Will in *Piers Plowman*.”⁵³

As Margery informs us in the first proem, she was inspired by many priests and other clerics to write her book through which she could reveal her experiences and feelings to her contemporaries. According to her own account, she waited twenty years before she consented to this project, but she could only realize it with the help of various writers. We are also told not to expect a fully developed narrative of spiritual revelations; instead: “Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, euery thyng aftyr oþer as it wer don, but lych as þe mater cam to þe creatur in mend whan it shuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wretyn þat sche had for-getyn þe tyme & þe ordyr whan thyngys befellyn” (5; “This book is not written in order, every thing after another as it is was done, but just as the matter came to this creature’s mind when it was to be written down, for it was so long before it was written that she had forgotten the time and the order when things occurred,” 36–37). If we discard our traditional expectations of a literary text and accept Margery’s *Book* as a compilation of many different literary and religious discourses, we might be able to understand much better the nature and true significance of the text and of Margery’s position as a writer than traditional scholarship was able to. As Barry (A.) Windeatt reminds us, “A dynamically individual logic and momentum in Kempe’s sense of her material has largely shrugged off clerical convention and gone its own way. A woman who listened so long and so intently to so many holy books might not need a male scribe to translate her feelings into the phraseology of those devotional texts which had most likely provided her with the very idiom through which to structure and express her own insights.”⁵⁴ The first step then will be to analyze what types of discourses have been utilized and how they interact with each other, while the second step will allow us to discuss Margery herself as a writer and what she reveals about herself as an independently-minded and powerful woman within late-medieval society.

As the introductory chapters illustrate, Margery conceived her text more or less as an autobiography as she reflects both on her attempts to terminate all sexual

⁵³ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Staley, 8; she does not, unfortunately, examine the literary strategies employed by Margery and so ignores one of the most fascinating aspects of this text as a literary creation. By contrast, her effort to sensitize us to the possibility that Margery’s presentations of town life, church history, and of political conflicts might be nothing but fictional (8–9), misdirects us in our critical analysis of the *Book* because it requires to be read in its historical-literary context and as a repository of at least this one woman’s metaphysical and historical experiences.

⁵⁴ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt. Longman Annotated Texts (Harlow, London, New York, et al.: Longman, 2000), 8.

intercourse with her husband out of spiritual desires, and on her efforts to gain some income through brewing ale and, once that had failed, to establish a horse-mill, which also failed. Contrasting her past life with her aspirations for the life of an hermit, she evokes the literary tradition of religious self-reflection, best exemplified by Augustine's *Confessiones*, and simultaneously situates it in the context of her daily life as a burgher's wife and as an enterprising woman, though she seems to have failed in earning her own money because her businesses collapsed. Appealing to her readers who obviously share her personal experiences within a mid-size town, she introduces herself as a role-model, particularly because she had been forced to close her businesses and turn to God for help: "Pan sche askyd God mercy & forsoke hir pride, hir coueytyse, & desyr þat sche had of þe worshepyys of þe world, & dede grett bodyly penawnce, & gan to entyr þe wey of euyr-lestyng lyfe, as schal be seyde aftyr" (11; "Then she asked God for mercy, and forsook her pride, her covetousness, and the desire that she had for worldly dignity, and did great bodily penance, and began to enter the way of everlasting life as shall be told hereafter," 45). Considering the extensive criticism that she regularly faced, we can deduce that her visions and public speeches often represented severe challenges for a local community that was threatened to be divided by her mystical perspectives.⁵⁵

In remarkable contrast to most other mystical accounts, Margery struggled hard to find a way out of her marital life and the sexual relationship with her husband. In fact, her *Book* illustrates the enormous conflicts that the writer went through because she desired to live a God-pleasing life, yet she was forced by her husband to sleep with him and to bear his children: "And aftyr þis tyme sche had neuyr desyr to komown fleschly wyth hyre husbonde, for þe dette of matrimony was so abhominabyl to hir þat sche had leuar, hir thowt, etyn or drynkyn þe worse, þe mukke in þe chanel, þan to consentyn to any fleschly comownyng saf only for obedyens" (11–12; "And after this time she never had any desire to have sexual intercourse with her husband, for paying the debt of matrimony was so abominable to her that she would rather, she thought, have eaten and drunk the ooze and muck in the gutter than consent to intercourse, except out of obedience," 46).⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *The Book of Margery Kempe* ed. Barry Windeatt, 21: "Not only does Kempe challenge assumptions that clothes are tokens giving broadly accurate signals about their wearers, but her ardent espousal of poverty inverts the incentives of a successful merchant community. Her vegetarianism seems eccentric and is resented as antisocial (1972–4); she spoils the conviviality of communal meals with insistently pious talk (2126–42); and her sobs and loud cries in church and elsewhere cannot but divide occasions of corporate devotion."

⁵⁶ Neuburger, *Margery Kempe*, 113, like many feminist scholars, absolutizes Margery's struggle against sexuality as a form of liberation, whereas Margery herself at a later point openly admits that she accepts her sexuality and considers her marital union as approved by God. The Godhead tells her

On the one hand we hear of Margery's personal worries as a wife suffering from religious and moral conflicts, on the other she also turns to the public and exposes herself to criticism by people because of her strict forms of fasting and vigils. She demonstrates that she is intimately involved both in a private and in a public discourse, the one affecting her husband, the other the parish, and consequently she is regularly accused of acting out contradictory roles and being a "false hypocrite": "Hir wepyng was so plentyuows and so contwynyng þat mech pepul wend þat sche myght wepyn & leuyn whan sche wold, and perfor many men | seyde sche was a fals ypocryte & and wept for þe world for socowr & for worldly good" (13; "Her weeping was so plentiful and so continual that many people thought that she could weep and leave off when she wanted, and therefore many people said she was a false hypocrite and wept when in company for advantage and profit," 48). Margery also reports of erotic conflicts with a man from her neighborhood who tried to have sex with her (14), subjugating her to the temptation of lechery, which then prepared her to feel profound compunctions ("compunccyon," 16). As a result, however, she prepared herself for the subsequent experiences with the Godhead who is talking to her directly in a vision: "Thys is my wyl, dowtyr, þat þow receyue my body euery Sonday, and I schal flowe so mych grace in þe þat alle þe world xal meruelyn þerof" (17; "This is my will, daughter, that you receive my body every Sunday, and I shall cause so much grace to flow into you that everyone shall marvel at it," 51). In other words, Margery suddenly switches from the self-reflective approach to a spiritual dimension where she enters a new communicative community with the Godhead.⁵⁷

VI. Hagiographical Elements

In the following chapter we are confronted with a new type of discourse, this one deeply influenced by the hagiographic genre as Margery constructs herself as a witness and participant of the original Biblical events, transforming herself into a maid and servant of St. Anna and then transposing herself into the immediate presence of the Virgin Mary: "And þan went þe creatur forth wyth owyr Lady to Bedlem & purchasyd hir herborwe euery nyght wyth gret reuerens, & owyr Lady was receyued wyth glad cher" (19; And then the creature went forth with our

in Chapter 36: "For it is appropriate for the wife to be on homely terms with her husband. . . , they must lie together and rest together in joy and peace" (126).

⁵⁷ For this concept of a 'communicative community,' see Albrecht Classen, *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung. Die Suche nach der kommunikativen Gemeinschaft in der Literatur des deutschen Mittelalters*. Beihefte zur Mediävistik, 1 (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 2002).

Lady to Bethlehem and procured lodgings for her every night with great reverence, and our Lady was received with good cheer," 53).⁵⁸ Margery also knows how to translate the spiritual dimension of her visionary experiences into the daily context of her personal life, such as when she is once hit by a rock and a beam that had fallen on her, yet did not incur any lasting damage because Christ comes to her rescue: "Soone aftyr sche cryed 'Thesu mercy,' & a-noon hir peyn was gon" (21–22; "Soon after she cried, 'Jesus, mercy,' and immediately her pain was gone," 56). Considering that Margery was spared from being hurt, and other people observed this miracle, too, she succeeds in projecting herself as a living testimony of God's miraculous intervention in human life. Moreover, she is also made into God's mouthpiece when she attends a meeting of monks and is informed by Him about the sinfulness of one of the monks. Insofar as the Godhead reveals to her the truth, and as she relates it to the monk, she assumes the function of a prophet and speaks in the language of the Old Testament: "'Syr, I vndyrstond þat 3e han synned in lechery, in dyspeyr, & in kepyng of worldly good'" (26–27; "Sir, I understand that you have sinned in lechery, in despair, and in the keeping of worldly goods," 62). Not surprisingly, the monk is deeply impressed and almost shocked, afraid of his own destiny, and subsequently treats Margery with the greatest respect because he now believes that God has bestowed her with his grace to foretell the future. Whereas most other people decry the author because of her excessive behavior in public, here she is deeply admired and regarded as a prophet.

VII. Margery Kempe as Narrator

Margery also demonstrates that she is both interested in and fully capable of entering a narrative discourse when she resorts to telling a didactic tale to illustrate her religious calling. The occasion itself proves to be highly fascinating because Margery relates an event when she was in Canterbury among monks who despised and criticized her for her excessive weeping. Her husband had removed himself from her out of embarrassment, and yet at this moment she is questioned by various monks of highest ranks who severely doubt the truthfulness of her devout behavior. One of them even fears that she might be influenced by the devil as he distrusts that she, as an unlearned woman, could speak in such holy terms to them: "'Eyþyr þow hast þe Holy Gost or ellys þow hast a devyl wyth-in þe, for þat þu spekyt her to vs it is Holy Wrytte, and þat hast þu not of þiself'" (28; "Either you have the Holy Ghost or else you have a devil within you, for what you

⁵⁸ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Windeatt, 30.

are speaking here to us is Holy Writ, and that you do not have of yourself," 63). The entire set-up reminds us of the biblical scene with the young Christ in the temple debating with the highpriests, especially as Margery then turns to the monks offering them all a tale: "'I pray ₃ow, ser, ₃eue me leue to tellyn ₃ow a tale'" (28; "'I pray you, sir, give me leave to tell you a tale,'" 63). Margery demonstrates how much she is in tune with traditional sermon exempla and powerfully holds her own grounds against the various accusations and reproofs against her, even when people charge her with being a Lollard (29). Obviously, the more she is attacked and in danger of being apprehended by the authorities or, for that matter, by the mob ready to burn her at the stake, the more Margery turns to God's love and gains His grace: "'Derworthy dowtyr, lofe þow me wyth al þin hert, for I loue þe wyth al myn hert & wyth al þe myght of my Godhed, for þow wer a chosyn sowle wyth-owt begynny[ng] in my syghte and a peler of Holy Cherch" (29; "Beloved daughter, love me with all your heart, for I love you with all my heart and with all the might of my Godhead, for you were a chosen soul without beginning in my sight and a pillar of Holy Church," 65). As Ruth Shklar suggests, this politico-religious dilemma or dissent with the Church authorities created grace and undermined her opponents' stance against this unruly woman.⁵⁹ Margery goes so far as to imagine how she could go through the same suffering as Christ during His passion, though she is afraid of the death pain and imagines a form of execution—beheading by an axe—that would be more tolerable for her. This setting makes it possible for her to have God speak to her in a lengthy monologue, expressing his profound love for Margery as His daughter: "Dowtyr, þer was neuyr chyld so buxom to þe fadyr as I wyl be to þe to help þe and kepe þe. I far sum-tyme wyth my grace to þe as I do wyth þe sunne. Sum-tyme þow wetyst wel þe sunne schynyth al abrod þat many man may se it, & sum-tyme it is hyd vndyr a clowde þat men may not se it . . . And ryght so far I be þe & be my chosyn sowlys" (31; "'Daughter, there was never child so meek to its father as I shall be to you, to help you and look after you. With my grace I sometimes behave towards you as I do with the sun. Sometimes, as you well know, the sun shines so that many people can see it, and sometimes it is hidden behind a cloud . . . And just so I proceed with you and with my chosen souls," 66). Even though the image used here does not imply a thorough knowledge of meteorology and natural science, nevertheless Margery carefully combines this factual discourse with her mystical vision and so builds an intriguing bridge between herself and her audience, especially as the image of the sun and the clouds proves to be easily understandable and makes it possible for the audience to comprehend the nature and significance of the mystical experience. Moreover, relying on a Biblical

⁵⁹ Ruth Shklar, "Cobham's Daughter: *The Book of Margery Kempe* and the Power of Heterodox Thinking," *Modern Language Quarterly* 56 (1995): 277–93; here 278.

reference (Mark 3:35), Margery casts herself in all possible female relationships with the Godhead, as the latter identifies her as “a very dowtyr to me & a modyr also, a syster, a wyfe, and a spowse” (31; “a daughter indeed to me, and a mother also, a sister, a wife and a spouse,” 66). These functions are subsequently illustrated through examples of compassionate piety and signify that female nature was particularly qualified to experience the Godhead in a mystical fashion. Moreover, Kempe acquired the highest possible authority, as Mary Morse now confirms, insofar as “God allows Kempe these freedoms so she can serve Him better.”⁶⁰ By the same token, as Liliana Sikorska argues, “Margery seeks the ideal of courtly love and seduction, intrigue and enigma in a sublime sense. She remains the object of courtship, which was one of the ways to cope with the absence of sexual relation.”⁶¹

Significantly, Margery also entered many different public discourses and struggled hard to defend herself against numerous accusations, such at a time when she paid a visit to the Bishop of Lincoln whose clerks questioned her critically but could not find any fault with her: “so þat hir answerys lykyd þe Bysshop ryght wel and þe clerkys had ful gret meruayl of hir þat sche answeryd so redyly & pregnawntly” (35; “so that her answers pleased the Bishop very much, and the clerks were astonished that she answered so readily and pregnantly,” 70). God’s message, delivered to her the next day, even forces her to proclaim publicly serious criticism of the Bishop who has not met with God’s approval: “‘Dowtyr, sey þe Bysshop þat he dredyth mor þe schamys of þe world þan þe parfyt lofe of God. Sey hym, I xuld as wel han excusyd hym ȝyf he had fulfyllyd þi wyl as I dede þe chyl dren of Israel . . . Þerfor, dowtyr, sey hym, þow he wyl not don it now, it xal be don an-oþer tyme whan God wyl.’” (35; “‘Daughter, say to the Bishop that he is more afraid of the shames of this world than the perfect love of God. Say to him, I would have excused him if he had fulfilled your will as much as I did the children of Israel . . . Therefore, daughter, say to him that, though he will not do it now, it shall be done another time when God wills it,’” 70–71). Curiously, she even refuses to carry out his request to ask the Archbishop of Canterbury, Arundel, to grant the Bishop of Lincoln leave “to ȝeun hir þe mentyl & þe ryng in-as-mech as sche was not of hys dyocyse” (35; “to give her the mantle and the ring, inasmuch as she was not from his diocese,” 71). This refusal does not prevent her from going to Canterbury, but only because she has her own reasons and refers to God who had given her different orders: “I xal not gon, for God wyl not I aske hym | þerafytir” (35; “I shall not go for that, for God does not wish me to ask the Archbishop about it,” 71). The entire exchange between Margery and the

⁶⁰ Mary Morse, “‘Tak and Bren Hir’: Lollardy as Conversion Motif in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” *Mystics Quarterly* 29, 1–2 (2003): 24–44; here 32.

⁶¹ Liliana Sikorska, *Voices Against Silence*, 167.

Bishop of Lincoln is remarkably characterized by various discourses, both legal and political in nature, and so also religious and marital. The latter discourse comes to the foreground in the first part of the chapter when she discusses her personal relationship with her husband: "And so sche went forth wyth hir husbond in-to-þe cuntre, for he was euyr a good man & an esy man to hir" (32; "And so she set off on her travels with her husband, for he was always a good and easygoing man with her," 68). Margery expresses some discontent with him since he abandons her from time to time out of fear of the public scandals that she might arouse, but "3et he resortyd euyr-mor a-geyn to hir, & had compassyon of hir, & spak for hir as he durst for dred of þe pepyl" (32; "he always came back to her again, and felt sorry for her, and spoke up for her as much as he dared for fear of other people," 68). Moreover, she expresses tenderness for him because she knows how much she can rely on him: "And euyr hir husbond was redy whan alle oþer fayled & went wyth hir wher owyr Lord wold sende hir, al-wey trostyng þat al was for þe best & xuld comyn to good ende whan God wold" (33; "And always, her husband was ready when everybody else let her down, and he went with her where our Lord would send her, always believing that all was for the best, and would end well when God willed," 68–69). Margery's *Book* contains many references to her husband and allows us to gain a good understanding of how these two people led their life together throughout many decades quite harmoniously, compensating for the shortcomings of the other whenever need arose.

The crucial point for our examination here, however, is not the autobiographical aspect, but the observation that Kempe has no hesitation to rely on the marital discourse within the broader context of religious and political discussions, knowing full well how to integrate this type of discourse into the interplay of the other discourses. This remarkable inquisitiveness made it possible for her to explore "a strong sexual identity" that provides her with a framework for the discovery of her spirituality.⁶²

Even if the amalgamation of many different voices, concerns, interests, reflections, and, above all, visions might seem to be chaotic in nature because lacking in structure, the ultimate impression proves to be the opposite. Furthermore, Margery's own account indicates the extent to which she was involved in a much more extensive exchange of discourses that also included theological literature. Interestingly, however, even the most important treatises that dealt with God's love were not adequate enough to compete with the personal exchanges that Margery enjoyed in her visions: "sum-tyme þe Secunde Persone in Trinyte; sumtyme alle thre Personys in Trinyte & o substawns in Godhede dalyd to hir sowle & informyd hir in hir feyth & in hys lofe how sche xuld lofe

⁶² *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Windeatt, 30.

hym, worsheypyn hym, & dredyn hym" (39; "Sometimes the Second Person in Trinity, sometimes all Three Persons in Trinity and one substance in Godhead, spoke to her soul, and informed her in her faith and in his love—how she should love him, worship him and dread him," 75). Against this pure and divine communication, that is, the mystical discourse, none of the religious authors could compete: "sche herd neuyr boke, neybyr Hyltons boke, ne [B]ridis boke, ne Stimulus Amoris, ne Incendium Amoris, ne non oper þat euyr sche herd redyn þat spak so hyly of lofe of God but þat sche felt as hyly in werkyn in hir sowle yf sche coud or ellys mygth a schewyd as sche felt" (39; "she never heard any book, neither Hilton's book, nor Bride's book, nor *Stimulus Amoris*, nor *Incendium Amoris*, nor any other book that she ever heard read, that spoke so exaltedly of the love of God as she felt highly working in her soul, if she could have communicated what she felt," 75). At the same time Kempe regularly allows the public discourse to enter her own account, such as when she reflects upon the ordinary people's threats and challenges: "& þerfor mech pepyl slawndryd hir, not leuyng it was þe werke of God but þat sum euyl spyrit vexid hir in hir body er ellys þat sche had sum bodyly sekenesse" (40; "And therefore many people slandered her, not believing that it was the work of God, but that some evil spirit tormented her in her body or else that she had some bodily sickness," 75).

This public discourse by itself, however, proves to be poly-voiced, insofar as the account reflects not only the opinions of the masses, but also the opinions by some of Kempe's supporters, some of whom even belonged to the clergy: "þis holy man, Vykary of Seynt Stefenys Chyrch of Norwych, whom God hath exaltyd & þorw meruelyows werkys schewyd & preuyd for holy, euyr held wyth hir & supportyd hir a₃en hir enmys in-to hys powyr aftyr þe tyme þat sche be þe byddyng of God had schewyd hym hir maner of gouernawns & leuyng, for he trustly beleuyd þat sche was wel lernyd in þe lawe of God" (40; "this holy man—Vicar of St Stephen's Church at Norwich, whom God had exalted and through marvellous works had shown and proved to be holy—he always took her side and supported her against her enemies as much as he could, after the time when she at God's command had told him about her manner of life and behaviour, for he faithfully believed that she was learned in the law of God," 75). This complex web of public discussion is subsequently enriched by God's own voice, as Margery relates the prophecies that were revealed to her: "þan was it reuelyd to þis creatur þat þe good Vykary xuld leuyn sevy₃n er aftyr & þan he sculd passyn hens wyth gret grace" (40; "And then it was revealed to this creature that the good Vicar would live for seven more years after this, and then he would pass hence with great grace," 76).

VIII. The Heteroglossic Phenomenon

In fact, herein we can identify one of the greatest strengths of *The Book* insofar as Kempe herself proves to be only one of many voices in a polyphonous choir of individual statements, exchanges, judgments, charges, defenses, declarations, revelations, confessions, and dialogues. Some of these are of secular, very personal nature, others are of divine provenance: “Madam, owyr Lord Ihesu Crist bad me telle ₃ow þat ₃owr husbond is in Purgatory & þat ₃e schal ben savyd but it schal be long er ₃e come to Hevyn” (46; “Madam, our Lord Jesus Christ bade me tell you that your husband is in purgatory, and that you shall be saved, but that it will be a long time before you get to heaven,” 81). Surprisingly, Margery at times emerges as the intermediary between both dimensions, transforming into the mouthpiece of the Godhead, relating to her neighbors and other people what the divine voice had told her upon a personal inquiry: “& as þis creatur preyd for hym, sche was answeyrd þat hys sowle xuld be xxx ₃er in Purgatory les þan he had bettyr frendys in erthe” (46; “And as this creature prayed for him, she was answered that his soul would be thirty years in purgatory, unless he had better friends on earth,” 82).

Margery also utilized highly complex forms of intertextuality, such as in the case with St. Bridget of Sweden’s mystical accounts. Instead of directly interacting with the text by this famous Swedish woman, she hears from the Lord “euery word þat is wretyn in Brides boke, & be þe it xal be knowyn for very trewth” (47; “that every word that is written in Bridget’s book is true, and through you shall be recognized as truth indeed,” 83). Margery sees herself in the same relationship with the Godhead as the one Bridget had enjoyed, and though she does not deal with her forerunner’s actual observations, visions, and revelations, she establishes an intriguing triangular relationship which ultimately assigns her the highest possible authority both as a mystic and as the author of a mystically influenced autobiography: “rygth as I spak to Seynt Bryde ryte so I speke to þe, dowtyr” (47; “just as I spoke to St. Bridget, just so I speak to you, daughter,” 83). Almost immediately following, however, she turns to another text model, when she has God reflect on people’s sinfulness, which results in a magnificent re-enactment of the religious discourse that characterizes the Old Testament: “I send hem prechyng & techyng, pestylens & batalylys, hungryr and famynyng, losse of her goodys wyth gret sekenesse, & many oper tribulacyons, & þei wyl not leuyn my wordys ne þei wyl not knowe my vysitacyon” (48; “I send them preaching and teaching, pestilence and battles, hunger and famine, loss of their goods, with great sickness and many other tribulations, and they will not believe my words nor will they recognize my visitation,” 84).⁶³

⁶³ For alternative forms of identification with other mystical writers and intertextual allusions, see Ute Stargardt, “The Beguines of Belgium, and the Dominican Nuns of Germany and Margery Kempe,”

The puzzling richness of literary discourses in Kempe's *Book* is compounded in the immediately following chapter as she suddenly turns to questions pertaining to sexuality, pregnancy, and the role of child-bearing women within the divine universe. Here the Lord informs her about her new pregnancy, which at first scares and depresses Margery because she thinks that God loves only holy maidens. Moreover, she admits her sexual relationship with her husband and requests to know how God views her as his vessel: "Lord, I am not worthy to heryn þe spekyng & þus to comown wyth myn husbond. Ner-þe-lesse it is to me gret peyn & gret dysese'" (48; "Lord, I am not worthy to hear you speak, and still to make love with my husband, even though it is great pain and great distress to me," 84).

Contrary to traditional theological arguments, God here expresses his support of human sexuality and describes it as a form of reward for being fertile: "Perfor is it no synne to þe, dowtyr, for it is to þe rapar mede & meryte, & þow xalt haue neuyr þe lesse grace, for I wyl þat þow bryng me forth mor frwte'" (48; "it is no sin for you, daughter, because it is reward and merit instead for you, and you will not have any the less grace, for I wish you to bring me forth more fruit," 84). Female sexuality emerges as a God-given gift, as Margery relates, serving as God's mouthpiece: "trow þow rygth wel þat I lofe wyfes also" (49; "rest assured that I love wives also," 84). Indirectly evoking traditional theological discourse on celibacy, virginity, and abstinence to achieve God's grace, Margery problematizes the question of the flesh and emphasizes that "þow þe state of maydenhode be mor parfyte & mor holy þan þe state of wedewhode, & þe state of wedewhode mor parfyte þan þe state [of] wedlake, 3et dowtyr I lofe þe as wel as any mayden in þe world" (49; "though the state of maidenhood [is] more perfect and more holy than the state of widowhood, and the state of widowhood more perfect than the state of wedlock, yet I love you, daughter, as much as any maiden in the world," 84–85).⁶⁴

Although God still characterizes sex as a form of sin, He adds that His own love for man "qwenchith al synne" (49; "quenches all sin," 85). Whereas Kempe expresses great fear that her "lak of maydenhed is to me now gret sorwe" (50; "lack of virginity is now great sorrow to me," 86), God assures her that her "synnes arn for3oue þe & þat we ben onyd to-gedyr wyth-owtyn ende" (50; "sins are forgiven [] and that we are united together [in love] without end," 86).

Considering this passage, it would be quite erroneous to assume, as many feminist scholars have done, that the author struggled hard to liberate herself from

The Popular Literature of Medieval England, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 277–313.

⁶⁴ Janel M. Mueller, "Autobiography of a New 'Creatur,'" 67: "Margery signals the fulfillment of her spirituality and selfhood through an expansion of her wifely and maternal concerns to encompass all the souls of Christendom in homely love."

her husband's sexual demands and found freedom from her physical prison through her mystical revelations.⁶⁵ Subtly but surely the author transforms the previous discourse on sexuality into a discourse on divine love that is so all-encompassing that no human frailty would be severe enough to undermine the relationship between the mystical soul and the Godhead. On the material level we are told that marital sex is acceptable, and on the discourse level we learn that Margery was fully competent to join the theological debate concerning human sexuality.

Moreover, the author has guaranteed herself a place in God's heart which will always protect her against the dangers of Hell, her extraordinary weeping, a weeping that has even won many souls from the fire in Hell (51/87). Her extraordinary shedding of tears, however, is described in metaphorical terms insofar as these tears "3ouyn hem drynkyn ful many tymes wyth teerys of thyn eyne" (52; "have given [Christ's mother and the saints] drink very many times, 87) — a remarkable combination of bodily with spiritual imagery.

IX. Margery Kempe and Her Male Contemporaries

Surprisingly, whereas many commentators have focused on Margery's persecutions as a suspected Lollard, as a nuisance to the Christian community, as a foolish figure within a male-dominated society,⁶⁶ in many cases Margery received strong support from the clergy who at times even asked her for her support: "Thys creaturys gostly fadyr cam to hir, mevyng hir to prey for a woman wech lay in poynt of deth to mannys syghte. & a-non owyr Lord seyde sche xuld levyn & faryn wel, & so sche dede" (54; "This creature's confessor came to her, urging her to pray for a woman who lay at death's door, as was thought, and then our Lord said she would live and thrive, and so she did," 89"). Not surprisingly, Kempe often demonstrates her prophetic abilities and expresses her specific experiences in the corresponding discourse: "'Sere, God knowyth what hys governawns is for, þat I wot of, I sey hym neuyr. & 3et I haue vndyrstondyng what

⁶⁵ See, for example, Verena E. Neuburger, *Margery Kempe*, 1994, 69, who claims that Kempe's mysticism was nothing but a vehicle to liberate herself from sexual subjugation: "I consider this the beginning of her fight for independence." Eadem: "Her wish for chastity, more than a means to ending her pregnancies, can be seen as a demonstration of liberation . . . by denying her husband access to her body, she symbolically claimed the right to a room of her own." (113).

⁶⁶ The most critical people opposed to Margery were the townspeople of Lynne who were afraid of her choice of celibacy, then local people from other towns in England who were afraid of her potential heresy, whereas the scholars and church hierarchy often supported her strongly if they were assured of her orthodox religious views, see Elona K. Lucas, "The Enigmatic, Threatening Margery Kempe," *Downside Review* (1987, October): 294–305.

hys gouernawns xuld be, & þerfor, ser, yf ȝe wyl do be my counsel & aftyr þat I fele, latyth hym chesyn & helpyn hym-selfe as wel as he can & medyl ȝe not wyth hym, for he xal dysceyue ȝow at þe last” (56; “Sir, God knows what his conduct is, for—as far as I know—I never saw him. And yet I have an understanding of what his conduct might be, and therefore, sir, if you will act according to my advice and to what I feel, let him choose and help himself as well as he can, and don’t you get involved with him, for he will deceive you in the end,” 92). She speaks with both the voice of divine authority and the voice of personal experience, and powerfully combines the individual-pragmatic with the mystical-theological in her exchange with the Godhead and with her earthly contemporaries.

Surprisingly, Kempe also indicates that she is fully in command of ordinary, chronicle-style discourse, which, however, is embraced by the prophetic discourse. Not only does she discuss her personal experiences and visions throughout her *Book*, she also relates public events, discussions, and deliberations, such as in the case of a town (name withheld) where the parishioners tried to acquire a papal bull authorizing them to upgrade a chapel to a parish church. At first without involving herself, the author (or the scribe?) provides a detailed account of the conflict: “fel gret ple & gret heuynes be-twen þe Priowr which was her person & curat & þe forseyd paryschenys þat desyred to haue fvntys & purificacyons in þe chapelys lych as weryn in þe parysch cherch” (59; “much litigation and much unhappiness occurred between the prior, who was their parson and curate, and these parishioners who wanted to have fonts and purifications in the chapels, as in the parish church,” 94). Only once the “þe preste which aftyrward wrot þis boke went to þe creatur of whom þis tretys makyth mencyon” (59; “the priest who afterwards wrote down this book went to the creature,” 95) and asked her about her opinion, do we hear her own voice again, and this time she reflects God’s opinion in this regard, serving as His prophet: “I vndyrstond in my sowle, þow þei woldyn ȝev[e] a buschel of nobelys, þei xuld not haue it” (59; “I understand in my soul that, though they should give a bushel of nobles, they should not have it,” 95). Consequently, in confirmation of her personal vision, the account concludes with the statement that the parishioners’ intentions were rejected: “&, as God wolde, þei were deceyuyd of her entent, and for þei wold han al þei lost al” (60; “and as God willed, they were disappointed in their intentions, and because they wanted to have everything, they lost everything,” 95). Even though this chapter seems to shed little light on Kempe’s personal opinion and involvement in the case, the report demonstrates that even the chronicle account was not alien to her, adding one more layer to the already highly complex narrative structure with many different voices and perspectives. Moreover, as Margery’s short comment indicates, she successfully injected her prophetic statement upon being asked about it by the priest, signaling once again that she

served as God's mouthpiece and claimed a central position within the public discourse. The mystic does not simply withdraw into her own soul where she enjoys the encounters with the Godhead; instead she turns to the public and specifically addresses communal concerns from her visionary perspective.

As has often been observed, Margery also heavily relied on the travelogue as a specific genre through which she could express her visionary experiences.⁶⁷ On her travels, or pilgrimages, she was able to combine her tearful expressions of mystical revelations with emotive piety in face of the holy sites. Moreover, the travel accounts indicate the problematic tensions between her English companions who feel embarrassed about her public performance and the people of her new environment, including Saracens, who are astonished and know little how to interpret her sobbing and crying. At the same time Margery faced severe ridicule at the hand of her fellow travelers who tried to make her look like a fool as a means to distance themselves from her: "þei dedyn hir mech shame & mech reпре as þei wenty[n] in dyuers placys. They cuttyd hir gown so schort þat it come but lytil be-nethyn hir kne" (62; "they caused her much shame and reproof as they went along, in various placed. They cut her gown so short that it only came a little below her knee," 98). Intriguingly, however, the author defended herself rigorously by maintaining her self-assurance and insisting that God would keep sharing His grace with her, which finds its vivid expression in the fact that Margery always encounters people who support her despite all attempts by the other travelers to isolate her, which, of course, "greuyd hir felawshap ful euyl" (62; "annoyed her companions terribly," 98). Those who travel always encounter problems with languages, but medieval authors hardly ever discuss these linguistic challenges. Margery, on the other hand, openly addresses her difficulties and utilizes them to her advantage insofar as the bridging of the language barrier represents for her another sign of God's working. In Rome, for instance, she meets a German priest and would like to discuss with him her visions and other religious questions, but she needs an interpreter at first (82/118). After thirteen days of prayer, however, both are able to understand each other, though this new communicative channel does not include any other person (83/119). Intriguingly, their connection becomes intensified while she confesses to him and then falls into a new and extreme crying stage. The priest trusts in her mystical power, especially as she is empowered to tell him secrets about him that nobody else would know: "of hys owyn mys gouernawns & hys leuyng, þe wech no man knew but God & he, as owyr Lord schewyd to hir be reuelacyon & bad hir tellyn hym, þat he wist wel þerby hir felyngys wer trewe" (83; "of his own misconduct and his manner of

⁶⁷ See, for instance, Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, 1983; Albrecht Classen, "Die Mystikerin als Peregrina: Margery Kempe: Reisende in corpore – Reisende in spiritu," *Studies in Spirituality* 5 (1995): 127–45.

living—which nobody knew but God and he, as our Lord showed her by revelation and bade her tell him,” 119). Hence, forced to acknowledge her divinely inspired visions, he “receyued hir ful mekely & reuerently ” (83; “received her very meekly and reverently,” 119), defending her against much public slander and criticism.

We may also say that Margery succeeded in creating a private forum of discourse involving only herself and the priest, whereas she was surrounded by a public forum of discourse which was hostile to her and threatened her in her very existence. The priest served as her defense against “many euyl wordys & meche tribulacyon” (83; “much evil talk and much tribulation,” 119), which also meant that he had to give up his office in support of her.

A regular aspect of her daily life was, of course, her prayer, and we often come across a textual example, such as: “‘Lord, as þow dreve a-wey hir enmys, so dryfe a-wey myn enmys, & kepe wel my chastite þat I vowyd to þe & late me neuyr be defowlyd, for ȝyf I be, Lord, I make myn a-vow I wyl neuyr come in Inglonde whil I leue” (65; “‘Lord, as you drove away her enemies, so drive away my enemies, and preserve my chastity that I vowed to you and let me never be defiled, and if I am, Lord, I vow that I will never return to England as long as I live,” 101). Or: “‘Lord, as wistly as þu art not wroth wyth me, grawnt me a welle of teerys, wherthorw I may receyue þi precyows body wyth al mener terys of deuocyon to þi worshep & encresyng of my meryte” (81; “Lord, as surely as you are not angry with me, grant me a well of tears, through which I may receive your precious body with all manner of tears of devotion to your worship and the increasing of my merit,” 117). Obviously, here she demonstrates, once again, how many narrative genres she dealt with and wanted to have integrated in her *Book*. Not surprisingly scholars have often described her text as uneven and weak in its structural organization,⁶⁸ but tried to explain these curious features away by emphasizing her mystical experiences which are, by nature, irrational and disorganized.⁶⁹ However, we gain a much better understanding and appreciation of Margery’s narrative account when we identify the intricate interplay of literary and nonliterary genres and comprehend the author’s considerable skills in weaving them together for the most effective way of presenting her life experiences as a mystic, pilgrim, writer, mother, wife, and devout Christian.

⁶⁸ B. A. Windeatt, in her “Introduction” to her translation (1985), defends Margery’s style as an unmediated reflection of her experiences, 27: “the extraordinary strains and variousness of Margery’s life as she remembers it give her text the unevenness of living, and mean that her *Book*’s very weaknesses prove its strength, as a work of human memory and the life of the self.”

⁶⁹ Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 62, argues that mystical texts basically differ from other medieval texts as the author conceives the words directly from the Godhead: “The mystic’s speech is a desire tied to nothing except the will of God.”

Not surprisingly, Margery had little difficulties in coping with the Church authorities even when they most severely challenged her as she was in full command of the widest range of discursive strategies. As Prudence Allen now confirms, “she was able to use discursive reasoning to defend herself in public situations of interrogation by educated men.”⁷⁰ This aspect comes best to life in her encounter with the Archbishop of York who at first tries to charge her for heresy, but soon enough is so deeply impressed not only by her solid Christian faith (“‘Sche knowith hir Feyth wel a-now. What xal I don wyth hir?’,” 125 [“She knows her faith well enough. What shall I do with her?” 163]), but also by her abilities to defend herself against all kinds of charges levied against her by the clerics in the Archbishop’s service that he turns entirely around and requests her to pray for him (128/166).

Margery impressively proves to be a bold, skillful, and sharp-witted speaker and easily turns all arguments against her around. When the Archbishop states that people have told him “þu art a ryth wikked woman” (125; “that you are a very wicked woman,” 163), she retorts: “‘Ser, so I her seyn qt 3e arn a wikkyd mán. And, 3yf 3e ben as wikkyd as men seyn, 3e xal neuyr come in Heuyn les þan 3e amende 3ow whil 3e ben her” (125; “Sir, I also hear it said that you are a wicked man. And if you are as wicked as people say, you will never get to heaven, unless you amend while you are here,” 163). This leaves the Archbishop speechless, especially as he is afraid of people’s negative opinion about him, and subsequently she dominates the entire exchange with him. Margery proves to be most fascinating in her rhetorical brilliance when a cleric accuses her of preaching in public contrary to St. Paul’s dictum “þat no womman xulde prechyn” (126; “that no woman should preach,” 164). Her defense is as simple as effective, as she points out the undeniable fact that she “come in no pulpytt. | I vse but comownycacyon & good wordys, & þat wil I do whil I leue” (126; “[does] not go into any pulpit. I use only conversation and good works, and that I will do while I live,” 164).

Moreover, unwittingly a learned doctor comes to her help when he accuses her of having told “þe werst talys of prestys þat euyr I herde” (126; “the worst tale about priests that I ever heard, 164), which provides her with the opportunity to retell this tale—another switch in genre and a new direction in her discursive strategy. This tale, however, not only demonstrates Margery’s considerable literary and narrative skills, but also reveals tremendously how much she can appeal to those around her, admonishing them to return to devotion and to seek God’s mercy. Both the Archbishop and the cleric show clear signs of how much they are moved by the tale, or exemplum, as the latter says: “þis tale smytyth me to þe hert” (127; “this tale cuts me to the heart,” 166). Taking advantage of her rhetorical victory, Margery adds a short anecdote about a preacher in her home

⁷⁰ Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman*. Vol. II, 476.

town Lyrn "wech boldly spekyth ageyn þe mysgouernawns of þe pepil & wil flatyr no man" (128; "who boldly speaks out against the misconduct of people and will flatter no one," 166). Though referring to this third person, Margery actually means herself and thus indirectly claims priestly authority and the right to preach herself, after all. Quoting the preacher, she addresses the harshest words of criticism against her opponent: "3yf any man be euyl plesyd wyth my prechyng, note hym wel, for he is gylty" (128; "If anyone is displeased by my preaching, note him well, for he is guilty," 166). This proves to be the triumphant conclusion of the discussion, as her opponent has to declare his defeat: "Þe clerk wist not wel what he myth sey to hir. Aftyward þe same clerk cam to hir & preyid hir of for3efnes þat he had so ben a-geyn hir" (128; "The cleric did not know what he could say to her, and afterwards the same cleric came to her and begged her for forgiveness that he had been so against her," 166).

Here we begin to understand one of the most crucial aspects of Margery account. Not only does the author demonstrate her ability to resort to a strategy of employing a wide-ranging array of narrative genres. But she also utilizes them powerfully to the best effect and creates a certain degree of independence that at first sight seems rare among late-medieval women writers. As a mystic, however, and as the composer of a fascinating religious autobiography, Margery achieves a remarkable status within her society and also abroad, demonstrating that discursive strategies can be more influential than traditional male authorities and the patriarchal structures of late-medieval society. This is best illustrated in the final scene before Margery's departure when she asks the Archbishop for his blessing: "He, preying hir to preye for hym, blissed hir & let hir go" (128; "He, asking her to pray for him, blessed her and let her go," 166).

Obviously, this one triumph did not guarantee the author freedom from further persecutions, as the following chapter, and many others in her *Book* illustrate. But Margery continues to utilize her most successful strategy of using many different genres, whether tales, prayers, rhetorical arguments, sermon exempla, biblical quotes, and legal defense. Tales, however, prove to be the most effective, whether during imprisonment or in public. After having been arrested under suspicion of being a Lollard, she resorts to this technique and immediately achieves the desired end, as one of the Duke's men confesses: "'Me ouyr-thynkyth þat I met wyth þe, for me semyth þat þu seyst ryth good wordys'" (130; "I rather regret that I met with you, for it seems to me that you speak very good words," 168). Even though Margery steadfastly denies that she is preaching, in fact her use of religious tales strongly suggests that she achieves the same goal anyway: "Þan stode sche loking owt at a wyndown, tellyng many good talys to hem þat wolde heryn hir, in so meche þat women wept sor & seyde wyth gret heynes of her hertys, 'Alas, woman, why xalt þu be brent?'" (130-31; "Then she stood looking out at a window, telling many edifying tales to those who would hear her, so much so that

women wept bitterly, and said with great heaviness of heart, "Alas, woman, why should you be burned?" 169).

At other times she seems to have resorted to intellectual, theological arguments, though these are not repeated in her text. We only learn that she entered public disputes and gained much respect for her wise words: "answeryng a-3en in Goddys cawse wyth-owtyn any lettyng, wysly & discretly þat many men merueyled of hir cunningg" (135; "answering back in God's cause without any hindrance, wisely and discreetly, so that people were amazed at her knowledge," 174). This amazement also affects the "men of law" who puzzle about her learnedness: "'We han gon to scole many 3erys, 3et arn we not sufficient to answeyn as þu dost. Of whom hast þu þis cunningg?'" (135; "We have gone to school many years, and yet we are not sufficient to answer as you do. From whom do you get this knowledge?'" (174).

X. Texts within Texts: More on Discourse

As this short dialogue demonstrates, Margery's effectiveness as a writer also depends on her ability to recount in great detail the words of her opponents, inviting us to share the personal experience she had during her discourses. Interestingly, Margery also operates with texts within her text, such as letters that she had received from the Archbishop of Canterbury. This allows her to demonstrate how intricate all communications can be, especially if they switch from the oral to the written. When she and her husband are about to be arrested by a man on horseback near Ely, she relates how much they both were rebuked and "al-to-reuyld" (136; "utterly reviled, 175) by him. But as soon as she has pulled out the letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury, peace is restored between them. In fact, the horseman even admits his guilt and only asks: "'Why schewyd me not 3owr lettyr be-forn?'" (137; "Why didn't you show me your letter before?," 175).⁷¹

Insofar as Margery did not only intend to relate her mystical visions, but also reflect upon her personal life, it comes as no surprise that she relates many aspects of very private matter, even medical aspects. This forces her to resort to some medical discourse, combined with religious imagery: "Sche had þe flyx a long tyme tyl sche was anoyntyd, wenyng to a be deed. Sche was so febyl þat sche myht

⁷¹ W. J. Ong, "Orality, Literacy, and Medieval Textualization," *New Literary History* 16 (1984): 1–12; Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, "Veneration of Virgin Martyrs in Margery Kempe's Meditation: Influence of the Sarum Liturgy and Hagiography," *Writing Religious Women: Female Spirituality and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, ed. Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 176–95; here 180.

not heldyn a spon in hir hand" (137; "She had dysentery for a long time, until she was anointed, expecting to be dead. She was so weak that she could not hold a spoon in her hand," 176). Not content with this one observation, she extends the discussion of her many sicknesses over several paragraphs, until she finally connects this discourse with her mystical discourse again: "A, Lord, for thy gret peyn haue mercy on my lityl peyne; for þe gret peyn þat þu suffredyst 3ef me not so meche as I am worthy, for I may not beryn so meche as I am worthy" (137; "A, Lord, because of your great pain, have mercy on my little pain: for the great pain that you suffered, do not give me as much as I am worthy of, for I may not bear as much as I am worthy of," 176). Most interestingly, this existential experience immediately leads to a new level of spiritual discourse, this one directly with the Godhead: "And in þat Chapel sche had so hy contemplacyon & so meche dalyawns of owr Lord, in-as-meche as sche was putte owt of chirche for hys lofe, þat sche cryed what tyme sche schulde ben howselyd as 3yf hir sowle & hir body xulde a partyd a-sundyr" (138; "And in that chapel she had such high contemplation and so much confabulation with our Lord, inasmuch as she was put out of church for his love, that she cried at the time when she should receive communion as if her soul and her body were going to be parted," 177).

XI. Narrative Voices

Although it often seems as if she were only exploring her personal, mystical relationship with the Godhead, we can also discover passages where she turns to her social environment and utilizes her prayer as a medium to reach out to all members of the human community: "Sumtyme sche wept an-oþer owr for þe sowlys in Purgatory; an-oþer owr for hem þat weryn in myschefe, | in pouerte, er in any disese; an-oþer owr for lewys, Sara₃inys, & alle fals heretikys þat God for hys gret goodnes xulde puttyn a-wey her blyndnes" (140–41; "Sometimes she wept another hour for the souls in purgatory; another hour for those who were in misfortune, in poverty, or in any distress; another hour for Jews, Saracens, and all false heretics, that God out of his great goodness should set aside their blindness," 179).⁷² Margery does not use the same theoretical discourse here as many of her contemporary philosophers did when they argued against the Jews, but she heavily relies on an emotive approach to the same issue, emphasizing "otherness,"

⁷² Although Kempe only fleetingly refers to Jews and Muslims as 'the Other' in medieval society, she unmistakably evokes the rich *Adversus Iudaeorum* tradition, whether she was directly familiar with it or not; for the broad historical and intellectual context, see Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law. Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

particularly their “myschefe,” “pouerte,” and “disease” (140–41/179). Almost by the same token, Margery assumes the task of intervening with God on behalf of people in need, acting in the capacity of a priest, though she always and adamantly rejected this accusation: “*3yf I myth as wel, Lorde, 3euyne þe pepyl contricyon & wepyng as þu 3euyst me for myn owyn synnes & oper mennys synnys also & as wel as I myth 3euyne a peny owt of my purse, sone xulde I fulfille mennys hertys wyth contricyon þat þei myth sesyn of her synne*” (141; “If I could, Lord, give the people contrition and weeping as good as that which you gave me for my own sins and other men’s sins also, and as easily as I could give a penny out of my own purse, I should soon fill men’s hearts with contrition so that they might cease from their sin,” 180). Not only does she perceive herself as graced by God through her ability to cry so vehemently, but she also projects herself as a role model for her contemporaries, basically claiming the role of a missionary and using the corresponding discourse relevant for this role: “*me thynkyth, þou þei had ordeynd for me þe most schamful deth þat euyr myth | any man suffyr in erde, 3et wolde I for 3euyne it hem for þi lofe, Lord*” (141–42; “I think that, though they [the people] had ordained for me the most shameful death that any man or woman might ever suffer on earth, yet I would forgive them it for your love, Lord,” 180).

A remarkable shift in Kempe’s discourse techniques occurs in the following chapter where she removes herself out of the account and has a third person reflect upon her religious expressions—which might, of course, also have been the result of the scribe’s involvement, though we should never fully ignore Kempe’s authority in all sections of her *Book*: “*Whan sche was gon, þe preste seyde to his modyr, ‘Me merueylyth mech of þis woman why sche wepith & cryith so. Neuyr-þe-les me thynkyth sche is a good woman, & I desyre gretly to spekyn mor wyth hir’*” (143; “When she was gone, the priest said to his mother, ‘I am amazed at why this woman weeps and cries so. Nevertheless, I think she is a good woman, and I greatly desire to speak more with her,’” 182). In addition, we are told that he read many books “*of hy contemplacyon*” (143; “of high contemplation,” 182) to her, which the author herself comments on, though she still relies on the third person pronoun: “*& þan wist sche þat it was a spirit sent of God which seyde to hir*” (143; “And then she knew it was a spirit sent from God which said to her these words,” 182).

But Kempe did not live without considerable temptations, such as when she reports of her sexual fantasies which she had of Christ Himself, of priests, and other men: “*Sche sey as hir thowt verly dyuers men of religyon, preystys, & many oper, bothyn hethyn & Cristen comyn be-for hir syght þat sche myth not enchewyn hem ne puttyn hem owt of hir syght, schewyng her bar membrys vn-to hir*” (145; “She saw, as she really thought, various men of religion, priests, and many others, both heathen and Christian, coming before her eyes so that she could

not avoid them or put them out of her sight, and showing her their naked genitals," 184). Not surprisingly, she associates all this intensive sexual imagery with the devil, and in her narrative she indicates the extent to which she struggled against the lewdness of her fantasy.⁷³ Nevertheless, what is remarkable about the entire passage is the unintentional revelation of her deep-seated sensuousness and longing for sexual intercourse: "Wher sche went er what so sche dede, þes cursyd mendys abedyn wyth hir" (145; "Wherever she went or whatever she did, these accursed thoughts remained with her," 184). Finally, an angel informs her about the reason for her voluptuous fantasies explaining their function to teach her a lesson to believe God's voice whenever she hears it in her soul ("þu beleuyst not þat it is þe spyrty of God þat spekyth in þi sowle" [146; "you do not believe that it is the spirit of God that speaks in your soul," 184]). According to the mystical-spiritual context of her account, these images are naturally cast in highly negative moral terms. By the same token, Margery indicates how much she is attuned to an amazingly psychological discourse on sexuality, perhaps borrowed from penitential literature, though here it is extremely personalized and transformed into a powerful soul-searching instrument. She openly admits: "þes horrybyl syghtys & cursyd mendys wer delectabyl to hir a-geyn hir wille" (145; "these horrible sights and accursed thoughts were delicious to her against her will," 184). Certainly, Margery casts her entire experience in moralistic and religious terms, as she does with practically everything she observes or learns about throughout her mystically influenced life. Nevertheless, what concerns me here is her powerful and fascinating demonstration that she does not even shy away from inserting this highly erotic discourse in her autobiographical account, both allowing us tremendous insight into her own psyche and also into the enormous breadth of literary and nonliterary discourses available to her. After all, she goes so far as to confess her most private thoughts and images, even though they are of such a sexual nature, as a medium to illustrate her spiritual rapprochement to God.

This intricate reversal of perspectives finds confirmation in the following chapter where she has other people relate their experiences with Kempe when they managed to calm her down and stop her from crying: "Þan wer prestys in þe same place wech knew hir maner of werkyng, | & þei ful charitefully led hir to a tauerne & dede hir drynkyn & made hir ful hy & goodly cher" (147–48; "Then there were priests in the same place who knew her way of behaving, and they very charitably took her to a tavern and made her have a drink, and made her very

⁷³ Morse, "*Tak and Bren Hir*," 36, sees a direct connection between Kempe's sexual fantasies and her fear of Lollardic heresy. This was, as Morse continues, a rather common notion "that sexual temptation eventually will lead to heresy, or alternately, that the lure of heresy will encourage sexual excess."

welcome with much kindness," 186). Adding weight to this dramatic feature, she has subsequently various people discussing among each other how to cope with Margery as a puzzling phenomenon, especially after a friar had said: "'I wolde þis woman wer owte of þe chirche; sche noyith þe pepil.' Summe þat weryn hir frendys answeyrd a-ȝen, 'Sir, haue hir excusyd. Sche may not withstand it.'" (149; "'I wish this woman were out of the church; she is annoying people.'" Some people that were her friends replied: "Sir, do excuse her. She can't control it,'" 188).

In regular intervals we also come across intertextual references that demonstrate the extent to which the author saw herself reflected in the texts of other mystical authors and gained authority for her own mystical experiences. Marie d'Ognie's *Vita*, for instance, proves to be an excellent mirror for Margery as they both shared the tendency to shed excessive tears as an expression of their love for the Godhead: "Of þe plentyuows grace of hir teerys he tretyth specyaly in þe boke beforn wretyn þe xviii capitulo þat begynnyth, 'Bonus es, domine, sperantibus in te,' and also in þe xix capitulo wher he tellyth how sche, at þe request of a preyste þat he xulde not be turbelyd ne distrawt in hys Messe wyth hir wepyng & hir sobbyng" (153; "Of the plentiful grace of her tears, it treats especially in the book before mentioned, in the eighteenth chapter which begins *Bonus est, domine, sperantibus in te*, and also in the nineteenth chapter, where it tells how she, at the request of a priest that he should not be troubled or disturbed at his mass by her weeping and sobbing," 192). Margery also explains how she became familiar with these literary sources and thereby demonstrates the extraordinarily fruitful juncture between the oral and the written: "He red also of Richard Hampol, hermyte, in Incendio Amoris leche mater þat meuyd hym to ȝeuyn credens to þe sayd creatur. Also, Eli₃abeth of Hungry cryed wyth lowde voys, as is wretyn in hir tretyys" (154; "He also read similar material about Richard of Hampole, the hermit, in the *Incendium Amoris*, which prompted him to give credence to the said creature. Elizabeth of Hungary also cried with a loud voice, as is written in her treatise," 193).⁷⁴

The extent to which Kempe reveals how much she learned from intertextual exchanges proves to be amazing and certainly dispels any doubts as to the textual creativity and productivity of her *Book*. Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa points out, for instance, "[t]he qualities of inspired wisdom, eloquence and integrity, and heroic martyrdom, exhibited by Katherine and celebrated in the Sarum liturgy, seem to have been a source of inspiration and consolation for Margery, who incurred the hostility of neighbours and ecclesiastical authorities as the result of her spiritual

⁷⁴ For the interaction between the oral and the written in medieval literature, see *Oral History of the Middle Ages: The Spoken Word in Context*, ed. Gerhard Jaritz and Michael Richter (Krems and Budapest: Medium Aevum Quotidianum, and: Department of Medieval Studies, CEU, 2001).

life."⁷⁵ To this we can now add that the author not only reflected upon her religious "reading," acquired through listening, but also responded actively by sympathizing and imitating the discourses provided in those texts. In this respect, it does not matter at all whether Kempe enjoyed true mystical experiences, or whether she simply imagined them. By emulating the mystical discourses she succeeds in recreating them for herself, adding new dimensions to the narrative structure of her multi-authored text. Its true literary quality does not only rest in the "eclectic, original and performative spirituality," as suggested by Denis Renevey,⁷⁶ but in the creative responses and further development of these heterogenous narrative elements sustaining this complex form of spirituality. Margery aims for more than simple spiritual interaction with her fellow citizens, and she certainly transcends the limit of her own bodily experience as a mystic when she translates these so remarkably well into writing.⁷⁷ Certainly, the one aspect does not exclude the other; on the contrary, they stimulate each other and propel the mystic to a higher level of religious perceptibility. Nevertheless, since we no longer can witness her self, her body, and her physical performance in reality, we are limited to her *Book*, which in itself demonstrates a remarkable degree of literary development and—admittedly—sometimes rather nonlinear, non-rational hermeneutic discourse, a phenomenon quite typical of most mystical literature. This multi-layered discourse, however, finds its full confirmation in the autobiographical, self-reflective, intertextual, and highly self-conscious narrative operation, which is not, as Richard Lawes now insinuates once again, caused by a psychological breakdown of her self as a result of her post-natal experience.⁷⁸ The notion of her text as being "autobiographical," of course, would require a careful qualification insofar as the collaboration with her scribes and their own injections are quite obvious, for instance: "Than þe prest which wrot þis tretys . . ." (153; "Then the priest who wrote this treatise . . .," 192). But we could argue almost along the same lines when Kempe has the Godhead intervene in her own discourse and replace her as the actual voice: "owr Lord seyde vn-to hir beyng in gret heuynes, 'Dowtyr, I bydde þe gon a-geyn in-to cherch'" (155; "our Lord said to her, she being in great heaviness of heart, 'Daughter, I bid you to go back into church,'" 194). In fact, Kempe assigns the Godhead an increasing role, almost like a preacher, as He instructs her in great detail about the afterlife, His plans with mankind, and His plans with Margery: "'Dowtyr, I sent onys Seynt Powyl vn-to þe for to strengthyn þe & comforyn þe'" (160; "'Daughter, I once sent St Paul to you to strengthen you and comfort you,'" 199). Occasionally the Virgin Mary also

⁷⁵ Yoshikawa, "Veneration of Virgin Martyrs," 185.

⁷⁶ Renevey, "Margery's Performing Body," 205.

⁷⁷ Renevey, "Margery's Performing Body," 211.

⁷⁸ Lawes, "Psychological Disorder and Autobiography," 232–33.

comes forward and voices her opinion regarding Margery's too rigorous fasting, encouraging her to return to a more moderate diet: "'I kan þe mor thank to etyn þi mete for my lofe þan to fastyn, þat þu mayst enduryñ thy perfeccyon of wepyng'" (162; "I can thank you more for eating meat for my love than for fasting, so that you may endure your perfection of weeping" 201). By the same token, the author never hesitates to include also those statements uttered by people of her social environment, such as a doctor of divinity: "'I had leuyr þan xx pownde þat I myth han swech a sorwe for owr Lordys Passyon'" (164; "It would be preferable to me than having twenty pounds, if I could have such a sorrow for our Lord's Passion," 204).

XII. External and Internal Topics

At times, Kempe also reflects on other people's worries and problems and demonstrates how much influence she could exert under the right circumstances. In the seventy-fifth chapter, for instance, she tries to rescue a woman from her mental derangement after the delivery of a baby, almost in direct analogy to her own problem discussed in the first chapter. Curiously, this lady acts in the same way as Margery does when she has her religious sensations: "Sche roryth & cryith so þat sche makith folk euyl a-feerd" (178; "She roars and cries, so that she scares folk badly," 218). Margery then assumes the role of nurse, confessor, and interlocutor with the Godhead until, indeed, this other woman recovers and gets her mind restored. However, this entire section seems to be told by her scribe: "he þat wrot þis boke had neuyr be-for þat tyme sey man ne woman, as hym thowt" (178-79; "he who wrote this book had never before that time seen any man or woman," 218). Then, however, she allows the straightforward autobiographical discourse to enter the narrative again, especially as she wants to relate in detail how her sixty-year old husband suffered from a bad accident and how she was called in to become his care-taker. Kempe places, however, much more emphasis on her exchanges with the Godhead regarding her husband's problems than on the practical steps that she took to nurse him back to health. At first we hear of people's renewed slander against her because she had not lived with her husband to avoid all temptations against her vow of chastity (179/219), accusing her of not having fulfilled the expected role of wife and so deserving the death penalty, even though John had simply fallen down the stairs.

Next the author explores, once again, the issue of marital sex and people's distrust of their vow of chastity. Skillfully weaving the rumors about the couple's deceptive behavior into her own defense of the various pilgrimages, Margery creates a narrative mirror of the interlacing discourses in public and in private, allowing us to witness the exchanges among the members of her community

regarding their pilgrimages: “& seydyn þat þei went rapar to woodys, grouys, er valeys to vsyn þe lust of her bodiys þat þe pepil xuld not aspyin it ne wetyn it” (180; “and said that they went rather to woods, groves or valleys, to enjoy the lust of their bodies, where people should not espy it or know it,” 220). Even if Margery seems to care little about the talking behind her back, she meticulously summarizes it and then builds her defense, relying, once again, on the Lord: “Pan sche preyid to owr Lord þat hir husbond myth leuyn a 3er & sche to be deliueryd owt slawndyr 3yf it wer hys plesawns” (180; “Then she prayed to our Lord that her husband might live a year, and she be delivered from slander, if it were his pleasure,” 220). Next she blends in the discourse with the Godhead who commands her to take care of her husband as this would be as much love service for Him as her previous crying and praying (180/220).

Having finished these meditations, the chapter closes with a surprisingly realistic description of Margery’s husband’s physical failures: “in hys last days he turnyd childisch a-3en & lakkyd reson þat he coud not don hys owyn esement to gon to a sege, er ellys he wolde not, but as a childe voydyd his natural digestyon in hys lynyn clothys þer he sat be þe fyre er at þe tabil, whepyr it wer, he wolde sparyn no place” (181; “in his last days he turned childish and lacked reason, so that he could not go to a stool to relieve himself, or else he would not, but like a child discharged his excrement into his linen clothes as he sat there by the fire or at the table—wherever it was, he would spare no place,” 221).

Most beautifully, Kempe also resorts to astronomical and scientific discourse for God’s explanations to her about his workings in her soul, and then provides the necessary allegorical explanations: “& as sodeynly as þe leuyn comith fro Heuyn, so sodeynly come I in-to thy sowle, & illumyn it wyth þe lyght of grace & of vndir-standyng” (182; “And as suddenly as the lightning comes from heaven, so suddenly I come into your soul, and illumine it with the light of grace and of understanding,” 222). Her crying, on the other hand, is compared to the various types of rainfall: “I send sum-tyme many gret reynys & scharp schowerys, & sumtyme but smale & softe dropis. & ryth so I far wyth þe, dowtyr, whan it likyth me to spekyn in þi sowle” (183; “I sometimes send many great rains and sharp showers, and sometimes only small and gentle drops. And just so I proceed with you, daughter, when it pleases me to speak in your soul,” 223). As if she had not spread a net of the most diverse discourse wide enough, the author also resorts to the Biblical discourse and paraphrases an important part of Christ’s Passion which she witnesses in a remarkable vision: “And þan a-non sche sey Iudas come | & kyssyn owr Lord, & þe Iewys leyd handys vp-on hym ful violentlyche” (190; “And then she immediately saw Judas come and kiss our Lord, and the Jews laid hands upon him most violently,” 230). Not content with being a direct witness through her vision, she also is catapulted into the dream action where she tries to defend Christ from the Jews’ attacks: “3e cursyd Iewys, why sle 3e my Lord Ihesu Crist?

Sle me rapar & late hym gon''' (192; "You accursed Jews, why are you killing my Lord Jesus Christ? Kill me instead, and let him go," 233).⁷⁹ Apart from its obvious anti-Judaism, this short exchange demonstrates once again how easily the mystic could transfer from the visionary account to the autobiographical, from the dream vision to the pragmatic travelogue, from dialogues with the Godhead to historically documented discussions with high-ranking representatives of the Church.

Most important prove also to be God's monologues in which He addresses Margery's innermost concerns: "And I | telle þe trewly, dowtyr, euery good thowt & euery good desyr þat þu hast in þi sowle is þe speche of God, al yf it be so þat her me not spekyn to þe sumtyme as I do sumtyme to þi cler vndirstondyng" (204; "And I tell you truly, daughter, every good thought and every good desire that you have in your soul is the speech of God, even if you do not hear me speaking to you sometimes, as I sometimes do to your clear understanding," 246). This also included, basically the hallmark of all mystical accounts, elements of bridal mysticism: "dowtyr . . . whan þu hast receyuid me in-to thy sowle þu art in pees & in qwyete & sobbist no lengar . . . þu wost wel þat I far lyke an husbond þat schulde weddyn a wyfe" (213; "daughter, . . . when you have received me into your soul, you are in peace and quiet, and sob no longer . . . you know that I proceed like a husband who would wed a wife," 254).

XIII. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Kempe's *Book* does not fall into the narrow category of a modern autobiography, far from it.⁸⁰ Instead we might better describe it as an autobiographically oriented compendium of mystical visions, dialogues with the Godhead, priests and archbishops, and a variety of lay people. Margery experimented with the very essence of discourse and was not constrained by any genre limitations, whether she had to defend herself against accusations of secret Lollardy, or whether she had to explain her extraordinary, mystically influenced

⁷⁹ Seth Lehrer, "'Represented now in yower syght': The Culture of Spectatorship in Late Fifteenth Century England," *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 29–62.

⁸⁰ For a discussion of late-medieval autobiography, see Albrecht Classen, *Autobiographische Lyrik des europäischen Spätmittelalters: Studien zu Hugo von Montfort, Oswald von Wolkenstein, Antonio Pucci, Charles d'Orléans, Thomas Hoccleve, Michel Beheim, Hans Rosenplüt und Alfonso Alvarez de Villasandino*. Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur, 91 (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 1991).

performance.⁸¹ Not surprisingly, modern scholarship has been both fascinated and confused, both attracted and repelled by this curious literary enterprise. Nevertheless, her stupendous ability to switch language codes, genre codes, individual voices, narrative perspectives, and thematic orientations provides us with sufficient evidence that her *Book* indeed can be identified as a major literary enterprise. Margery's account does not follow a linear logic and successfully resists all attempts by modern scholarship to pigeon-hole the author according to traditional literary standards and categories. Particularly because Margery was free from all public constraints and could, as an autobiographical author, easily move from one genre to the other, from one topic to another without fearing scholarly criticism or the rejection by her audience, she realized one of the most important features of all literary discourses—free associations, combination and integration of discourses from the widest range possible, and regular switching from dominant to subordinate discourse, and the reverse.

At times she as a woman speaks, at times we might face one of her scribes, or even the voice of the Godhead, but the crucial aspect proves to be, after all, Kempe's enormous skill in utilizing the multiple language registers, narrative masks, and various types of discourse. Taking the entire *Book* into account, we can firmly reject any attempt to downgrade this mystical narrative as the result of a disjointed mind or as the product of postpartum hysteria.⁸² Certainly, the author does not make it easy for us to follow her discourse because she allows many different voices to mingle in her text—the heteroglossia that Bakhtin had described so superbly for other literary-historical contexts, but which have proven to be ideally attuned to the textual phenomena in the Middle Ages.⁸³ The *Book* demonstrates, however, that Kempe was an extraordinarily powerful, though certainly not always likeable character who successfully transgressed social and theological limitations imposed on late-medieval women. Her considerable success both as a writer and as a “divinely inspired person” was based not only on her mystical experiences, but also on her enormous personal strength in withstanding social and political pressure exerted by her social community and

⁸¹ Mary Morse, “*Tak and Bren Hir*,” 2003, 39. By the same token, Morse seems to stretch her argument a bit too much, transforming Margery's religious context into the all-determining factor (“The discourse of Lollardy creates a contextual space for Margery Kempe, a space in which accusations, questions, and answers coalesce to prove such aberrance necessary for one who has been chosen by God as a spiritual instructor”). There is, after all, Margery as an independent writer, thinker, traveler, and God's mouthpiece, whether she responded to the accusation of Lollardy or not.

⁸² Richard Lawes, “Psychological Disorder and Autobiography,” 2000.

⁸³ For an excellent application of Bakhtinian theory to a medieval romance, see Arthur Groos, *Romancing the Grail: Genre, Science, and Quest in Wolfram's Parzival* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 17–45, et passim; see also Sabine Obermaier, *Das Fabelbuch als Rahmenerzählung: Intertextualität und Intratextualität als Wege zur Interpretation des Buchs der Beispiele der alten weisen Antons von Pforr*. Beihefte zum Euphorion, 48 (Heidelberg: Winter, 2004), 23–35.

particularly the Church hierarchy, on her boldness in traveling all over the known world to visit the major pilgrimage sites, and on her remarkable ability to put into writing, by means of her amanuenses, both her personal experiences and the events surrounding her life. As Liliana Sikorska observes, "In a way Margery, being alienated from the community, substitutes both her earthly family and friends for a heavenly family and holy people. She draws upon the written culture to lessen her own insecurity about becoming a text."⁸⁴

Ultimately, her autobiographical account demonstrates that she transformed her entire life into discourse, if not performance, as in the case of the Flemish beguine and mystic, Elisabeth of Spalbeek (d. after 1274),⁸⁵ and this oral discourse soon required its fixation in writing, inviting the spectators to participate in her personal experiences. It does not matter whether her *Book* was the result of her visions of the Godhead, of her intensive crying fits, or her desire to provide spiritual comfort for her potential audience. As a postmodern reading of her text, informed by the notion of *bricolage*, clearly demonstrates, Margery Kempe had a tremendous understanding of the power of the written word and knew that she could establish herself and her mystical visions as a determining factor in the literary world of her time.

Even when she seems to disappear behind her scribes' words—"Thys creatur, of whom is tretim be-forn" (248; "This creature, who has been written about in the preceding treatise, 292)—the mystical writer herself comes to the foreground again and determines the discourse as the book concludes with a lengthy prayer by Kempe. Modern sensitivity often tends to shrink back from this woman writer, as she could be as much a nuisance and scandal today as she was in fifteenth-century England. Nevertheless, seen in light of the two decisive factors discussed in this and the preceding chapters—medieval women's self-determination and the power of the literary discourse—we may conclude that *The Book of Margery Kempe* proves to be an outstanding milestone in the history of women's literature—not necessarily a comfortable one, but certainly an astonishingly powerful testimony of one woman's struggle to forge her own way to gain spiritual enlightenment and to express herself in writing, drawing on many different genres and playing with a wide range of literary registers. There is no doubt we have to deal with Margery Kempe, irrespective of her stance within or outside of the canon of Middle English literature. Her voice is loud and clear, along with those of the other female writers discussed in this book.

⁸⁴ Sikorska, *Voices Against Silence*, 159.

⁸⁵ Ziegler, "Elisabeth of Spalbeek's Ecstasy," 193, suggests, with respect to this Flemish beguine, "The mysticism of Elisabeth clearly displays this relationship between repetitive practice and performance." This can also be applied to Margery Kempe. For a comparison, see Elliott Visconsi, "'She Represents the Person of Our Lord': The Performance of Mysticism in the *Vita* of Elisabeth of Spalbeek and the *Book of Margery Kempe*," *Comitatus* 28 (1997): 76–89.

Chapter Nine

Helene Kottanner: A Fifteenth-Century Eye-Witness Turned Author. The Earliest Medieval Memoirs by a German Woman Writer

I. The Lesson of Feminism and Gender Studies: The Literary and the Factual Text

Feminist and gender-oriented research has taught us a number of highly valuable lessons not only with regard to women's important contribution to literature and the arts throughout history, but also with regard to the nature of literature in the first place. For instance, the commonly accepted view of what constitutes literature—without doubt a highly amorphous term in the first place—has been seriously challenged in the last ten to fifteen years. After all, in our search for medieval women writers we have learned to accept many different text genres as meaningful media particularly for women, even if they do not always meet traditional expectations of a “literary” text.¹ In fact, the terms “literature” or “fictionality” might heuristically no longer be the most useful to grasp the basic nature particularly of medieval textual culture, whether we think of epistolarity, annalistic literature, or didactic texts.² Instead of relying on purely aesthetic and

¹ See the wonderfully refreshing discussion of this and similar questions by Terry Eagleton, *Einführung in die Literaturtheorie*. Aus dem Englischen von Elfi Bettinger und Elke Hentschel. Sammlung Metzler, 246 (1983; Stuttgart: Metzler, 1988), 1–18; for medieval aspects, see Douglas Kelly, *The Art of Medieval French Romance* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), chapters 1–3; see also Hayden V. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

² Regarding letters from early medieval nuns, see Janina Cünnen, *Fiktionale Nonnenwelten. Angelsächsische Frauenbriefe des 8. und 9. Jahrhunderts*. Anglistische Forschungen, 287 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2000). In her introduction, Cünnen also offers an insightful theoretical discussion of fictionality/non-fictionality in its relationship to literature. For a discussion of didactic literature, see Ruth Weichselbaumer, *Der konstruierte Mann. Repräsentation, Aktion und Disziplinierung in der didaktischen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Bamberger Studien zum Mittelalter, 2 (Münster, Hamburg, and London: LIT, 2003), 27–31.

idealistic criteria, as developed in the eighteenth century, and instead of drawing from a rather artificial opposition between 'factual' and 'fictional' for the definition at least of medieval literature, today it seems much more appropriate to relate authors with textual communities, performative practices, and commemorative functions. This would make particularly good sense if we think of convent literature, sermons, mystery plays, hymns, polemic literature, and chronicle accounts.³

We have observed this phenomenon both in the case of the *Sisterbooks* and in Margery Kempe's *Book*, and we will also discover it in Helene Kottanner's memoirs, the subject of the present chapter. But this theoretical realization will also shed new light on the fundamental character of twelfth- and thirteenth-century literature which was, as Hans Robert Jauß and Walter Haug, among others, have demonstrated, deeply influenced by the 'discovery' of fictionality, though the notion of 'fiction' at that time still differed profoundly from 'fiction' in modern terms.⁴

Surprisingly, however, even the most "literary" texts, such as the courtly romances by Hartmann von Aue, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Gottfried von Strassburg, Heinrich von dem Türlin, Konrad von Würzburg, and Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken's prose novels, include many pragmatic discussions of factual issues, whether of medical or military nature, whether of an astronomical or dietary kind. In other words, even here the term "literature" would require considerable qualifications and could not be equated with the poetic discourse since ca. 1750.⁵

³ Patrick Wormald, "The Uses of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England and Its Neighbours," *TRHS* 5, 27 (1977): 95–114; Brian Stock, R. I. Moore, "Literacy and the Making of Heresy, c. 1000–c. 1150," *Heresy and Literacy, 1000–1530*, ed. P. Biller and A. Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 19–37; Seth Lehrer, "'Represented now in yower syght': The Culture of Spectatorship in Late Fifteenth Century England," *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace (Ann Arbor: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 29–62; Thomas Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

⁴ Hans Robert Jauß, "Zur historischen Genese der Scheidung von Fiktion und Realität," *Funktionen des Fiktiven*, ed. Dieter Henrich and Wolfgang Iser. *Poetik und Hermeneutik, X* (Munich: Fink, 1983), 423–31; Walter Haug, *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts: eine Einführung*. 2nd ed. (1985; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992).

⁵ Fritz Peter Knapp, *Historie und Fiktion in der mittelalterlichen Gattungspoetik: Sieben Studien und ein Nachwort*. Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1997); siehe dazu meine Besprechung in: *Seminar* 34.4 (1998): 441–42. Gertrud Grünkorn, *Die Fiktionalität des höfischen Romans um 1200*. Philologische Studien und Quellen, 129 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1994), formulates correctly (187): "Die These einer nicht existierenden Fiktionstheorie im Mittelalter wird durch die Gemeinsamkeiten von Dichtung und Geschichtsschreibung begründet, die ihre kategoriale Trennung unmöglich macht. . . . Inhaltlich sind Dichtung und Geschichtsschreibung

II. Women in the Late Middle Ages

In the late Middle Ages, which witnessed the emergence of more women writers than ever before,⁶ many of the male-determined literary and artistic norms and concepts changed. This happened at a time when particularly new religious experiences (*Devotio moderna*, the communities of the Beguines, mysticism, Lollardism) and a burgeoning individualism required different modes of expression since spiritual reality was far removed from quotidian reality. In other words, the polarity between fictionality and factuality is not a very useful heuristic paradigm, especially not for the critical examination of late-medieval women's literature.⁷ If we consider, for instance, a representative cross-section of high-medieval literature, we can easily observe considerable variations of the literary taxonomy insofar as scholarship has hardly ever hesitated to incorporate texts from the corpus of *artes mechanicae* and even *artes magicae* into the corpus of canonical 'literary' texts from that time, whereas letters and travelogues are treated as rather questionable contributions.⁸ Here I want to suggest to include the genre of *memoire*-literature into the broad range of late-medieval narratives as well because it does not only meet most of the criteria defining the art of narrative, but also because it provided a significant medium for one fifteenth-century German woman writer access to the public discourse.

Postmodern discussions concerning the nature of fictionality and the essence of literature prove to be surprisingly germane to the issue at stake in our investigation of medieval women's textuality.⁹ Medieval mysticism, for instance,

gleichermaßen einem zweifachen Wahrheitsbegriff verpflichtet, insofern es hinter der Darstellungsebene eine allgemeinere abstraktere Wahrheit, Gottes Wirken etc. auszumachen gilt" (187; The thesis regarding a non-existent theory of fiction in the Middle Ages is based on the common elements shared by poetry and historiography, which make their categorical distinction impossible. . . . As to their content, poetry and historiography are equally committed to a double concept of truth insofar as it is their task to fathom, behind the level of narrative projection, a more general, more abstract truth, God's working). We might summarize her findings by underscoring the fundamental epistemological function of all medieval texts, whereas their entertaining or informative function is only of secondary significance. See also Fritz Peter Knapp, *Historie und Fiktion in der mittelalterlichen Gattungspoetik: Sieben Studien und ein Nachwort*. Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1997).

⁶ Prudence Allen, R.S.M., *The Concept of Woman*. Vol. II: *The Early Humanist Reformation, 1250–1500* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2002).

⁷ Almost by the same token, this can also be observed for the early Middle Ages, see Janina Cünnen, *Fiktionale Nonnenwelten*, 4–22.

⁸ *Medieval German Voices in the 21st Century. The Paradigmatic Function of Medieval German Studies for German Studies. A Collection of Essays*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literatur, 46 (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 2000).

⁹ For a postmodern perspective, see Lutz Rühling, "Fiktionalität und Poetizität," *Grundzüge der Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold and Heinrich Detering. 4th ed. (1996; Munich:

was one of the most intriguing options for religiously inspired women, many of whom successfully explored various ways of expressing their revelations and visions by means of a myriad of poet and visual images and texts. In order to achieve their goals of transmitting their experiences to their audiences they had to resort to a wide range of textual media, both literary and nonliterary. For instance, as the works by Mechthild von Magdeburg (German) and Margery Kempe (English)—admittedly both very different mystical writers, one from the thirteenth, the other from the fifteenth century—demonstrate, two remarkable features highlight even the most diverse mystical discourses in the various languages. First, visionary authors rely, often simply by default, on a considerable spectrum of textual genres, such as the dialogue and the monologue, the letter, the hymn, dramatic settings, erotic and religious poetry, and fictional narratives, as we could observe in the case of Hildegard of Bingen. Second, the very essence of the mystical experience necessitates a highly unusual approach that forgoes the logical, rational structure of traditional discourse and often has to rely on an apophatic vocabulary.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, mystical texts tend to be characterized by a type of *bricolage*, which is not to say that they lack order or a systematic development.¹¹ Rather, the very absence of an internal structure often represents the fundamental strength of mystical accounts particularly because the mystics were free to experiment with the widest range of genres and literary expressions and did not have to concern themselves with rational, structural issues that were basically in contradiction to their visions. We have observed some of these features with regard to the Southwest German *Sisterbooks*, and also with regard to Margery

Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001), 25–51; for medieval perspectives, see Horst Brunner, “Literarische Formen der Vermittlung historischen Wissens an nicht-lateinkundiges Publikum im Hoch- und Spätmittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit,” *Wissensorganisierende und wissensvermittelnde Literatur im Mittelalter. Perspektiven ihrer Erforschung. Kolloquium 5.–7. Dezember 1985*, ed. Norbert Richard Wolf. *Wissensliteratur im Mittelalter*, 1 (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1987), 175–86; Dennis Howard Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction, 1150–1220* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4, defines “fiction” as a “category of literary text which, although it may also include events that were held to have actually taken place, gives an account of events that, although possible, did not take place, and which, in doing so, invites the intended audience to be willing to make believe what would otherwise be regarded as untrue.” This definition might be hermeneutically useful for the exploration of twelfth-century romances, but it erects so many barriers to other types of texts, also written at that time, that this definition ultimately proves to be more detrimental than useful.

¹⁰ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism. Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200–1350)*. The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism, III (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 157; Bruce Miley, *The Unspoken Word. Negative Theology in Meister Eckhart's German Sermons* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002).

¹¹ For a brief definition of *bricolage* and *bricoleur* according to Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Derrida, see Jeremy Hawthorn, *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*. 4th ed. (London and New York: Arnold and Oxford University Press, 2000), 32–33.

Kempe's *Book*. But these writers were not the exception to the norm; instead they might be best described as the most outstanding representatives of a wide range of female writers in the Middle Ages.

Another important, though little surprising corollary resulting from feminist and gender-oriented research concerns the observation that medieval women commonly did not enjoy the same access to specific literary genres, such as the courtly romance and the heroic epic, and had to rely on less male-dominated text types to express themselves, such as the letter, the chronicle, the visionary account, liturgical plays, the fable, and also more factual texts, such as cookbooks,¹² some of which I will discuss in the last chapter. By contrast, courtly romances, lyric poetry, and the sermon seem to have been the almost absolute domain of male writers, if we disregard the extraordinary exception of the *troubairitz*, Marie de France, and Christine de Pizan. But even in the field of courtly love poetry a number of recent discoveries have signaled that we might have to change our entire understanding of women's roles within medieval literary discourse.¹³

III. Helene Kottanner

In this chapter I want to explore a most fascinating example of a chronicle, memoirs, or perhaps an autobiography, composed by a female author, Helene Kottanner's fifteenth-century *Denkwürdigkeiten*, in order to examine the question in greater detail to what extent women participated in the public discourse by means of resorting to genres or modes of speech traditionally marginalized in modern literary scholarship. Certainly, many historians have recognized the specific value of Kottanner's account which sheds significant light on late-medieval Hapsburgian and Hungarian politics and proves to be an excellent eye-witness account of highly dramatic events.¹⁴ Her text has even been subjected to a close linguistic analysis.¹⁵ Some literary scholars have also ventured to include

¹² See, for example, Doris Tophinke, "Zur Schriftpraxis einer Kaufmannsfrau im Spätmittelalter — Die Briefe der Margarethe Veckinhusen," *Bausteine zu einer Geschichte des weiblichen Sprachgebrauchs III. Forschungsberichte und feministische Fragestellungen. Internationale Fachtagung Dresden 15.–16. 09. 1997*, ed. Gisela Brandt. *Stuttgarter Arbeiten zur Germanistik*, 363 (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag, 1998), 5–22; Libuše Spáčilová, "Olmützer Frauen schreiben ihre Bittschriften. Ein Beitrag zum weiblichen Sprachgebrauch in Mähren," *ibid.*, 23–44.

¹³ See, for example, Albrecht Classen, *Late-Medieval German Women's Poetry*, 2004.

¹⁴ Erik Fügedi, *Kings, Bishops, Nobles and Burghers in Medieval Hungary*, ed. Janos M. Bak (London: Variorum, 1986), 159, 175, 179.

¹⁵ Vilmos Ágel, *Überlegungen zur Theorie und Methode der historisch-synchronen Valenzsyntax und Valenzlexikographie, mit einem Valenzlexikon zu den "Denkwürdigkeiten der Helene Kottannerin" (1439–1440)*, with an English summary. *Lexicographica: Series major*, 25 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1988).

this text into their study of late-medieval women's literature,¹⁶ but key issues regarding the literary quality of these *Memoirs* have remained considerable desiderata, especially within the Anglophone world.¹⁷

Although Helene Kottanner primarily composed a detailed report of events concerning Queen Elizabeth and the Hungarian crown, here I will argue that her text deserves to be treated as a literary contribution as well.¹⁸ My main thesis will be that the more or less factual nature of her account does not detract from the idiosyncratic literary quality, especially if we consider this text in its discursive structure and functionality. Heimito von Doderer claimed in 1924 that Helene's *Memoirs* were "Denkwürdigkeiten" (notable documents) and a "Lebensdokument" (document of a life), which he partially edited in a slightly modernized form because he was interested in the author's remarkable "Tat" (deed) and not in her language or imagery. Did von Doderer even perceive the *Memoirs* as a literary text?¹⁹ Surprisingly, until today modern scholars have not shed much light on these *Denkwürdigkeiten*, disregarding the fascinating possibility that here we deal with a significant body of a woman's narrative.

Admittedly, Helene Kottanner has been mentioned occasionally in larger reference works and in surveys of Austrian literary history, but then mostly as a curiosity and as a source for cultural-historical information.²⁰ In reality, however,

¹⁶ Ursula Liebertz-Grün, "Autorinnen im Umkreis der Höfe," *Frauen Literatur Geschichte. Schreibende Frauen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Hiltrud Gnüg and Renate Möhrmann. 2nd, completely rev. ed. (1985; Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 1999), 12–28; here 27. In her short analysis of Kottanner's text she emphasizes, without going into any details: "Ihre Sprache ist abwechslungsreich und unabgegriffen. Ihr spannender Augenzeugenbericht zeichnet sich aus durch Detailgenauigkeit und eine Fülle aufschlußreicher Beobachtungen. Die Unbefangenheit, mit der sie von der Aktion erzählt, läßt den Schluß zu, daß sie in einer Umwelt lebte, in der Frauen, die innerhalb der patriarchalen Strukturen selbstbewußt und souverän Handlungschancen wahrnahmen, mit gesellschaftlicher Zustimmung rechnen konnten."

¹⁷ For a brief overview of the basic biographical and historical facts, see Maya Bijvoet, "Helene Kottanner," *An Encyclopedia of Continental Women Writers*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson. Vol. 1 (New York: Garland, 1991), 657–58; Albrecht Classen, *Frauen in der deutschen Literaturgeschichte. Die ersten 800 Jahre. Ein Lesebuch*. Ausgewählt, übersetzt und kommentiert von Albrecht Classen. Women in German Literature, 4 (New York, et al.: Peter Lang, 2000), 110–11.

¹⁸ Karl Mollay, ed., *Die Denkwürdigkeiten der Helene Kottannerin 1439–1440*. Wiener Neudrucke, 2 (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag für Unterricht, Wissenschaft und Kunst, 1971); this text is also available in several Hungarian translations. Apart from Mollay's edition, here I will rely on the English translation *The Memoirs of Helene Kottanner (1439–1440)*, transl. from the German with Introduction, Interpretative Essay and Notes by Maya Bijvoet Williamson. Library of Medieval Women (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998). For a partial translation into modern German, see my *Frauen in der deutschen Literaturgeschichte des Mittelalters*.

¹⁹ Heimito von Doderer, "Helene Kottanner. Denkwürdigkeiten einer Wienerin von 1440," *Die Wiederkehr der Drachen. Aufsätze / Traktate / Reden*. Vorwort von Wolfgang H. Fleischer, ed. Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler (Munich: Biederstein, 1970), 221–26.

²⁰ Alice Wengraf, "Aus den Denkwürdigkeiten der Helene Kottannerin," *Ungarische Rundschau* 3, 8

we actually need to read her account as a significant “literary” document of a fifteenth-century woman writer. Subsequently I will subject the text to a close reading and will attempt to demonstrate how much a non-factual, rather an artistic, individualized and personalized perspective permeates these *Memoirs*, ultimately transforming the seemingly factual report, or memoirs, into a respectable literary document.

The basic facts about Helene Kottanner and her chronicle are well known by now, especially as they can be verified (and also corrected) by contemporary sources. She was born around 1400 in Ödenburg/Sopron as the daughter of Peter Wolfram, a man of the lower nobility in the service of some West Hungarian lords.²¹ Helene married the Hungarian burgher Peter Szekeles who was mayor of Ödenburg for at least thirteen years. He died in 1430, and one year later his widow married Johann Kottanner who was the chamberlain of the Dean of the Viennese cathedral. In her *Memoirs* Helene mentions that they had some children together, one of whom—Katharina—she mentions by name when she comments that she was forced to leave this child behind at one time because she had to travel with her mistress, Queen Elizabeth (33; 51).²² Helene apparently entered the royal service in Vienna in 1436 as a nurse and caretaker of the little Princess Elizabeth; more properly, she was one of Elizabeth’s ladies-in-waiting, and in that function she exerted considerable influence and was treated with great respect, which her *Memoirs* explicitly demonstrate in multiple ways.²³ The curt title of her position is very deceptive, as Maya Bijvoet Williamson emphasizes: “She was not only in charge of the queen’s wardrobe and the material well-being of the ladies-in-waiting, she was also entrusted with the education of the king’s children, gave council and was listened to, had a considerable impact on Queen Elizabeth’s decisions, and was sent on a highly dangerous secret mission.”²⁴

In April of 1439, Helene followed her Lady from Vienna to Hungary because the latter’s husband, King Albrecht II (Albert) of Hapsburg, had succeeded to the Hungarian throne in personal union. While the latter still had been Duke (Albrecht

(1970): 438–41; Herbert Zeman, “Österreichische Literatur: Zwei Studien,” *Jahrbuch der Grillparzer-Gesellschaft* 3, 8 (1970): 11–56; here 17–18.

²¹ The first name is the German version, the second name is the Hungarian version.

²² Here and throughout the first page number refers to the original German text, the second page number to the English translation.

²³ Beatrix Bastl, “Das österreichische Frauenzimmer. Zum Beruf der Hofdame in der Frühen Neuzeit,” *Das Frauenzimmer. Die Frau bei Hofe in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*. 6. *Symposium der Residenzen-Kommission der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*, ed. Jan Hirschbiegel and Werner Paravicini. *Residenzenforschung*, 11 (Stuttgart: Jan Thorbecke, 2000), 355–75, discusses representative cases from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century when the ladies-in-waiting were increasingly recruited from the lower nobility. Nevertheless, Bastl’s study sheds instructive light on the everyday life of these women at (Hapsburgian) courts.

²⁴ Maya Bijvoet Williamson, *The Memoirs*, 2.

V) of Austria (b. 1397), he had married Emperor Sigismund's daughter Elizabeth in 1422, and after the death of his father-in-law, he had been elected King of Germany, on March 18, 1438. The coronation as King of Hungary followed on January 1, 1439 and took place in the traditional coronation site, Stuhlweissenburg (in Hungarian Székesfehérvár), but notably the Hungarian Estates rejected Elizabeth's right to the throne. In fact, after a near-riot during Albrecht's absence from Hungary (April 1338 to May 1439), when he had fully entrusted the government to his wife contrary to the concessions that he had given to the Estates, and during a subsequent Diet convoked by Albrecht at Buda in May 1439, the factual power of government was handed over to the Diet, including the right to choose husbands for the royal daughters.²⁵ Only six months later, however, on October 27, 1439, Albrecht died from dysentery. The Hungarian nobles of lower rank, and especially those who came from the area bordering the kingdom of Serbia, immediately requested that Elizabeth remarry since they needed a strong ruler to defend the country against the Turkish threat.²⁶ They had set their mind on the Polish King Wladislaus III, who was only sixteen by then, whereas Elizabeth, pregnant again and expecting a boy conceived with Albrecht II according to the doctors' predictions, was thirty-one years old. Elizabeth pretended to listen to the Hungarian nobles' recommendation, but she trusted that her child would be a boy who, once born and crowned, could assume the throne as the male heir under her government. Officially, however, Elizabeth agreed with the Hungarian magnates, yet privately she told Helene Kottanner to try to steal the Holy Crown, thus securing the most important insignia for the coronation of the legitimate ruler over Hungary.

Although Helene did not enjoy any particular social rank, her personal relationship with the Queen and her considerable pragmatic experience, circumspection, and reliability made her the perfect candidate to carry out this highly risky scheme. Helene was, undoubtedly, Elizabeth's confidant, at least for a short period during her pregnancy until the time of her son's delivery and the subsequent coronation.

As the "chronicler" tells us, not only was she successful in removing the crown without being noticed, but she also transported it to Queen Elizabeth just in time for the baby's delivery: "In derselben stuend, als die heiligen kron von der Plintenburg kam zu Gamaren, in derselbigen stuend do ward kung Lasla geborn" (19; "Within the same hour in which the Holy Crown arrived from Plintenburg in Komorn, within that same hour King Lászlá was born," 34).²⁷ The subsequent

²⁵ Pál Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen. A History of Medieval Hungary, 895–1526*, transl. by Tamás Pálósfalvi. English edition ed. by Andrew Ayton (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2001), 279.

²⁶ Camil Muresanu, *John Hunyadi. Defender of Christendom.*, transl. by Laura Treptow (Iași, Oxford, and Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 2001), 62–63.

²⁷ For technical reasons I do not reproduce the superscripta in the original text and spell out the

events became very complicated, as Elizabeth continued to face serious opposition by the Polish king and the Hungarian nobles. Helene tries her best to summarize her observations, using a more global perspective. On February 22, 1440, the little boy, Ladislaus V Posthumus, was baptized in the chapel of the castle at Komorn, followed by his coronation in Stuhlweissenburg / Székesfehérvár on May 12, 1440 as the new king of Hungary. Nevertheless, as we learn from other sources—Helene's account breaks off in mid-sentence—the Polish King Wladislaus was crowned King of Hungary on July 17, 1440, after Ladislaus V's coronation had been declared null and void.²⁸ His supporters used a newly-made crown "from the crown that was on the head-reliquary of St. Stephen and declared in a solemn document that the newly-made crown would have the same *signamentum, mysterium et robur* [significance, mystery, and strength] as the Holy Crown itself."²⁹ Nevertheless, despite the solid support of the majority of Hungarian landed gentry and despite the use of all other royal paraphernalia that Helene Kottanner had not secured for Queen Elizabeth, nothing could equal the symbolic power of the original, the Holy Crown, allegedly sent to the first Christian king of Hungary, King St. Stephen in the year 1000 (but probably dating from the late thirteenth century). Consequently, Ladislaus V could secure his rule of Hungary and governed until his death on November 23, 1457. His mother died already on December 19, 1442.

Apparently Helene never seems to have gained closer contact with her Lady again, though the Royal House proved to be thankful for her service, as she and her husband received, as a gift, the royal property Kisfalud on the peninsula outside of Pressburg (now Bratislava). This grant was made by János Hunyadi, governor of Hungary since 1446,³⁰ but the Kottanner couple could obviously not take secure hold of this property until 1458 when their legal right was confirmed

diphthongs, which represent the *umlaut*, instead.

²⁸ János Bak, "The Late Medieval Period," *A History of Hungary*, ed. Peter Sugar et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 54–82; here 63; Pál Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen*, 280–81, emphasizes that the competition between Wladislaus and Ladislaus (V) Posthumus initiated a long-term internecine civil war which, eventually, drastically decimated Hungary's strength and willingness to resist the approaching danger from the Turks; for the significant role of John Hunyadi in these deliberations, see Camil Muresanu, *John Hunyadi*, 63.

²⁹ Erik Fügedi, *Kings, Bishops, Nobles and Burghers in Medieval Hungary*, ed. J. M. Bak (1980; London: Variorum Reprints, 1986), I:179.

³⁰ Camil Muresanu, *John Hunyadi*, 128, emphasizes: "The ascension of John Hunyadi to the leadership of the country was certainly due to the prestige he had gained during the campaigns he had led against the Ottomans, during which he had demonstrated so many qualities, both in victory as well as in defeat. But it was also a consequence of his personal power and the special place that he held among the noblemen. As a result of his political views he was close to the lesser nobility and supported by it. But in actuality he had become one of the most prominent higher noblemen in Hungary."

by Ladislaus's successor, Matthias Corvinus, who was elected king in that year.³¹ Hungarian politics remained a tumultuous affair, however, as the monarchy was rocked by assassinations, massive opposition against the Hapsburgian ruler, Ladislaus's quick departure from Hungary in April or May 1457 to Vienna, and his death on November 23, 1457. The Hungarian Diet elected Matthias Hunyadi (Corvinus) as his successor in 1458.

IV. The First Female Autobiography in Medieval German Literature

Helene's memoirs or autobiography—the latter term could be applied to her text only tentatively³²—primarily deals with global politics and illuminates the particular role that she played in them. Nevertheless, the true interest in this text rests in its personal, reflective, and individualizing perspective, whereas practically all scholars have so far focused on the public, not private aspects of her *Memoirs*.³³ After she had delivered the crown to Queen Elizabeth, for instance, she comments: "Es kund sich nye gefuegen, daz ich also lang allain bey ier gewesen wër, daz ich ir das von dem anfangk vncz an das end hiet mogen gesagen" (18; "It was never possible for me to be alone with her long enough to tell her the entire story from beginning to end, for we were not together much longer," 33).

The question whom Helene Kottanner tried to reach with her text, and consequently how we are to evaluate her *Memoirs*, whether as a purely historical document, or as a text with a literary character, has been discussed rather controversially. Bijvoet Williamson suggests that "the particular audience with which Helene Kottanner sought to ingratiate herself was composed of the young

³¹ Maya Bijvoet Williamson, *The Memoirs*, 57–58; for the history and cultural development under Matthias Corvinus, see *Matthias Corvinus und die Renaissance in Ungarn 1458–1541*. Catalogue of the Exhibition May 1–November 1, 1982 (Vienna: Amt der Niederösterreichischen Landesregierung, 1982); Jörg K. Hoensch, *Matthias Corvinus: Diplomat, Feldherr und Mäzen* (Graz: Styria, 1998).

³² Magdalena Heuser, "Einleitung," 1–12; here 3: "Ein einseitig an literarischen Formtraditionen ausgerichteter Literaturbegriff erlaubt nur solche Vorstellungen von Bedeutsamkeit eines Lebens und Legitimation für dessen Beschreibung und Veröffentlichung, die mit dem literaturgeschichtlichen Kanon von Texten und Autoren kompatibel waren. . . . Eine Vernachlässigung der Kategorie 'Geschlecht' hat sich für wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen von Autobiographien als entscheidender Fehler erwiesen; die Lebensbeschreibungen von Frauen werden entweder gar nicht erst beachtet oder aber einseitig an solchen Maßstäben gemessen, die ihnen gar nicht gerecht werden können." For a broader discussion of the autobiographical genre, see my study *Die autobiographische Lyrik des europäischen Spätmittelalters*, 1991, 1–88.

³³ Sabine Schmolinsky, "Zwischen politischer Funktion und Rolle der 'virgo docta': Weibliche Selbstzeugnisse im 15. Jahrhundert," *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 24 (1998): 63–73; here 65–66: "Als gute Erzählerin folgt Helene trotzdem ihrem Plot, ohne die eigene Person zum Erzählgegenstand *sui generis* zu erheben, so daß man von autobiographischem Schreiben nicht sprechen kann. Nicht privates, sondern öffentliches Leben wird dargestellt; daher trifft die Bezeichnung Memoiren zu."

King Ladislaus and the powerful Hungarian magnates without whose political support his kingship was meaningless."³⁴ But a critical reading of the *Memoirs* does not necessarily imply that the author had primarily the well-being of Hungary in mind, though she expresses, from time to time, some reservations about Queen Elizabeth's personal decisions.³⁵ On the contrary, Helene proves to be an author who pursued both autobiographical and chronological interests, and in this process she succeeded in projecting a remarkable literary portrait of herself.

The entire discussion leads us, however, once again into the traditional direction of a purely historical evaluation of the narrative. This is not to say that the efforts to identify Helene's political orientation are of little value, quite on the contrary, particularly because her account proves to be so detailed and appears, despite some obvious errors, highly trustworthy. Nevertheless, the key question for the current issue remains whether the *Memoirs* can be counted as a literary text as well, and if we can incorporate Helene into the annals of the history of German literature.³⁶ They are, as Karl Mollay confirms, the oldest memoirs written by a woman in the Middle Ages, and they provide a host of highly valuable information pertinent to the conflicts between Queen Elizabeth and the Hungarian Estates.³⁷

The author seems to offer the answer to this taxonomic question herself when we consider the introduction to her account. There she writes about the events in a very factual, pragmatic manner and clearly signals her purpose to provide an exact chronicle account:

Do von Cristi gepurd ergangen warn fierzehenhundert vnd dar nach in dem Newn vnd Dreissigsten iar zu den Ostern vnd phingsten, Vnnd do der edel furst Albrecht erwelt was zu dem heiligen Römischen Kung vnd vormaligen kron zu Vngern auch enphangen het vnd die KungInn auch enphangen het, Do kom sein gnad her nach Prespurk vnd blieb nicht lang hie. Da kam die edel KungInn fraw Elyzabeth zu irm gemêhel von Ofen gen Prespurk (9).

[When after the birth of Christ fourteen hundred years had passed, and when after that the thirty-ninth year had advanced to Easter and to Pentecost, and when the noble

³⁴ Maya Bijvoet Williamson, *The Memoirs*, 60, note 19; she points out that Ingo Reiffenstein, in his review of Mollay's edition of Kottannerin's account, suggests a very different option, that is, that Kottanner tried to defend the legal and political claims of the young king (*Sprachkunst* 4, 1–2 [1973]: 164–66).

³⁵ Maya Bijvoet Williamson, *The Memoirs*, 62.

³⁶ Even historians often ignore her statements entirely and discuss Queen Elizabeth's struggle for political survival without regard for this crucial source, see, for example, C. A. Macartney, *Hungary. A Short History*. Edinburgh University Publications: History, Philosophy, and Economics, 13 (Edinburgh: At the University Press, 1962), 51–52.

³⁷ Karl Mollay, "Kottanner(in), Helene," *Lexikon des Mittelalters*. Vol. 5 (Munich and Zurich: Artemis, 1991), 1463.

King Albert [Albrecht] had been elected Holy Roman King and then had received the crown of Hungary, and the queen had received it too, his grace came to Pressburg and did not stay here long, 21].

Ursula Liebertz-Grün highlights the following aspects in Helene's *Memoirs* certainly as the most noteworthy ones: she was an alert eyewitness, a good observer of people, refreshing as a writer, providing an exciting historical account and a reliable chronicle, and she was an unusually self-confident and sovereign writer.³⁸

Indeed, the author quickly conveys the impression that she intends to provide us with a detailed and carefully crafted report of the most important events surrounding the royal house, the political situation in Hungary, and, to some extent, of her own personal role in these historical events: "Darnach vnlang hueben wir vns mitsampt der KungInn vnd die Jung edl furstinn vnd fuern da hin ab gen Ofen. Nicht lang da warn wir zu Ofen vnd Sakchman vber die Dewtschen geschach" (9; "Not long thereafter, we left with the queen and the noble young princess and rode off to Ofen. We had not been in Ofen very long when there was an uprising against the Germans," 21). On the one hand the author resorts to the plural pronoun "we," but then she also emphasizes her personal perspective which provides her with the relevant legitimation for writing her account: "Do was Ich, Helene Kottannerin auch da vnd ward ich auch mit gesandt nach dem hof Kung Albrechts vnd auch sein gemêhel der edlen vnd allernedigisten frawn" (9; "And I, Helene Kottanner, was there too, for I had been sent along to the court of King Albert and also of his wife, the noble and most gracious queen," 21).³⁹

We find the same formulation many times over the next pages, particularly when the author intends to alert her reader to the particular role that she played individually during these significant political events: "vnd Ich, Helena Kottannerin was auch dabei vnd trueg die Jungen fürstinn an meinem arm vnd wol sach, wie, wo man hin têt die Heiligen Kron" (10; "And I, Helene Kottanner, was there too, carrying the young princess on my arm, and I saw clearly how they placed the Holy Crown there," 22). In fact, as the subsequent narrative demonstrates, the entire chronicle concentrates on Helene and the royal crown, whereas the queen, the court, the Hungarian Magnates, and even Helene's own family tend to fade into the background.

Moreover, the author emphasizes, above all, the intimate relationship between herself and Queen Elizabeth who desperately needed Helene's advice and help

³⁸ Ursula Liebertz-Grün, "Höfische Autorinnen. Von der karolingischen Kulturreform bis zum Humanismus," *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*. Vol. 1: *Vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler (Munich: Beck, 1988), 39–64; here 60–63.

³⁹ Kottanner refers to herself by using the feminine suffix 'in,' which is not commonly used in modern English.

during those difficult times shortly before her delivery and while she was under pressure by the Hungarian nobility to marry the Polish king:

do nam mich ier gnad in ier gehaim vnd sprach: "liebe vnd getrewe Quottannerin, lasst euch mein tochter enpholhen sein, vnd auch die kamer, da laszt nyemt in gen Dann mein tochter vnd ir" (11).

[she secretly confided in me and said: "Dear, faithful mother Kottanner, watch over my daughter and also over that room. Do not allow anyone to enter it except my daughter and yourself," 24–25].

Elizabeth underscored the confidence she had in her chamber maid by entrusting to her the royal valuables: "Vnd enphalch mir auch ir kran vnd ir halspant vnd ander ier klainat, das het ich alles in derselben kamer, da durch man In gieng zu der Heiligen kron" (11; "for safekeeping her own crown and her necklace and other jewels, all of which I kept in the room through which one had to pass to get to the Holy Crown," 25). Not only did Helene control the central icon of the Hungarian kingdom at that point, but also the entire treasure of her queen. Moreover, Lord Ladislaus highlighted the significant role that was assigned to Helene when he addressed Elizabeth: "'gnedige fraw, ir solt mit der frau schaffen, daz sie nyempt in dew Kamer lasz, vnd auch meinen purkgrafen'" (11–12; "Gracious lady, give this woman orders not to allow anyone into that room, not even my castellan," 25).

Here surfaces one of the most characteristic feature of this narrative account as the author employs two strategies at the same time. On the one hand Helene relates the events surrounding Queen Elizabeth as she observed them herself, trying to describe them in a systematic, detailed, and objective manner. On the other hand, she never suppresses her urge to focus on her personal perspectives and to illustrate her individual responses, actions, and words. For instance, Helene relates verbatim what her Lady said in response to the Magnates' request that she remarry: "'Lieben herren, gebt mier nicht ainen Haiden, gebt mier lieber ainen kristen pauren'" (12; "Dear lords, please do not give me a pagan; I would sooner marry a Christian peasant," 25). And she summarizes the three conditions that Elizabeth had stated upon which she would marry: "hielt Si in drey sach fuer, die man wol wais" (12; "she stated three conditions, which are well known, 26).⁴⁰ These are, however, still Helene's *Memoirs*, hence she takes all liberty to reflect upon her own thoughts and freely comments on the people around her and the specific events.

⁴⁰ Maya Bijvoet Williamson, *The Memoirs*, 26, note 25, could not identify these three conditions. Helene, however, later in her account lists three laws in the kingdom of Hungary that were the *conditiones sine qua non*: "The first law requires that the king of Hungary be crowned with the Holy Crown. The second, that he be crowned by the Archbishop of Gran. The third, that the coronation take place in Stuhlweissenburg" (43). Perhaps these are the three conditions Helene refers to earlier.

At one point, when Queen Elizabeth asked her whether she would be prepared to steal the Holy Crown for her child, the writer added the limiting clause: "daz die recht zeit nicht komen was" (12; "although the right time had not come yet," 26). Here Helene intervenes and tells us directly how wrong the Queen was to believe that: "Aber das was die recht Ierrung, daz die recht nicht komen was, dar an got der almoechtig seine wunder werch wuerchen wolt" (12; "As you will hear henceforth, however, it was truly a mistake to think that the right time had not yet come for God Almighty to perform His miraculous deeds," 26). In fact, the author perceives herself as the all-decisive confident who shares private knowledge with the Queen, such as when the latter decided to move from the upper castle at Plintenburg to the lower parts so as not to be trapped by the Hungarian Magnates in case they might get wind of her secret plans with the crown. Helene, with whom she had obviously conferred about her decision, concludes: "Warumb das was, das wessat nymant nach got. Dann ir gnad vnd ich" (13; "And why that was, nobody knows but God except her grace and myself," 26). Moreover, long time before the actual theft of the crown, Helene was in charge of securing Elizabeth's personal crown and jewelry from the upper castle without anybody finding out what she was doing. Again we learn how much the narrator and her Lady cooperated to deceive the Magnates: "Vnd das tet ich vnd kam auf das haws vnd in meinem gewant pracht ich dar von in grosser gehaim meiner gnedigen frawn Kran vnd all Ir klainat auf ainem Sliten" (13; "I did this and went to the queen's residence above and in utmost secrecy brought down from there my gracious lady's crown and all her jewelry on a sled, hiding everything under my clothes," 26).

Heightening the sense of danger, Helene reports that she was intercepted by the castle's castellan, Lord Ladislaus Garai, and other Hungarian nobles who were suspicious about her package: "'Helena Quottannerin, was fuer ir her?' — 'Ich fuer mein gewant'" (13; "Helene Kottanner, what is it you are bringing with you?" — "I am bringing my clothes," 27).

This short scene nicely illustrates the extent to which the author not only perceived herself as situated in the center of the important political and military events concerning the destiny of Hungary itself, but also knew very well how to present these events to her audience in a dramatic fashion. The new circumstance with all the jewels and the Holy Crown being hidden in Helene's room add important weight to this perspective because Helene relates how much she worried about a possible discovery: "vnd ich behielt das vnder dem pett mit grossen sorgen, wann wir chain truhen da nicht heten" (13; "And I kept it under the bed and worried much about it, because we did not have any trunks there," 27).

Significantly, Helene's personal perspective is immediately coupled with the public, highly political discussions between the queen and the Hungarian nobles,

which suggests that the author must have been present at most of the relevant exchanges and negotiations, especially because she never mentions any written sources for her account and relates the entire account from the standpoint of an eye-witness:

Da nue die edel KungInn den vngrischen herren ain antbuert geben het von des Kungs von Polan wegen, als ir vor gehort habt . . . da schieden die vngrischen herren von der Plintenburg wider gen Ofen (13).

[When the noble queen had answered the Hungarian lords concerning the matter with the Polish king in the manner you have heard, . . . these Hungarian lords left Plintenburg and went off to Ofen, 27].

Most important, the Queen herself confirmed that Helene was the only person at her court whom she could fully trust and who would be able to carry out her plan to steal the crown. At this point, the "chronicler" suddenly turns into an autobiographical writer as she reflects upon her own fears and insecurity: "vnd das erkam ich hart, wann es was mir vnd meinenn klainen kinden ain swër wagnuss" (13; "The queen's request frightened me, for it meant great danger for me and my little children," 27). Moreover, as she admits, she herself could not rely on any confidant and seemed to have been distanced from all the other ladies-in-waiting: "vnd west auch nyemantz Rats ze fragen Dann got allain" (13-14; "there was no one I could ask for advice except God alone," 27).

In fact, increasingly Helene's personal concerns, fears, and worries find expression in her account. Once a man from Croatia had been introduced to their plans but had immediately shrunk back from their proposition out of fear for his life, and then had run away to his home country. Subsequently Helene reports that the Queen was afraid "daz der dayg vmb die sach nue wessat" (14; "that the coward knew about this business," 28). Immediately following she reports: "Ich was auch in grossen sorgen, aber es was freilich gots wil" (14; "I too was deeply concerned, but it all truly was the will of God," 28). Although her subsequent ruminations do not carry much weight for the historian interested in her memoirs as a valuable eye-witness report, they demonstrate that the author embarks on significant digressions and allows her personal perspective to permeate the factual report, entirely reorienting its narrative intention:

Wann hiet die sach zu derselben zeit ainen furgangkch gehabt, so wër meiner frawn gnad mit grossem pauch vnd mit der Heiligen Kran her auf gen Prespurg geczogen, So wër die edel frucht, die Si noch trueg, gehindert worden an der kronung, wann Si hiet villeicht hinfur solche hilf vnd macht nicht mogen gehabt, als Sie es die weil het, als es sich seid wol erfunden hat (14).

[For if we had carried out our plan at that very time, my gracious lady still would have been pregnant while traveling to Pressburg with the Holy Crown, and then the noble child she still carried in her body might not have been crowned king, for she probably

would not have had the assistance and power then which she had later, as it has turned out, 28].

Indeed, Helene's account gains in interest for us today much more for the personal elements than for the factual details. For instance, when she was about to enter the room with the crown safely sealed in a trunk, the Castellan suddenly got ill and had his bed placed next to the door. Fortunately for Helene and the Queen, "Da ward sich sein krankchait meren, als dann got haben wolt" (15; "his illness worsened, which was the will of God," 28), and moved to another room.

If Helene had written her text in the same way as contemporary chroniclers were accustomed to do, she would have limited herself to the grand schema of things, such as to the conflicts between Queen Elizabeth as the representative of the Hapsburgian family and the Hungarian Magnates, to the negotiations between the latter and the Polish King, and perhaps also to the theft of the Holy Crown.⁴¹ Her specific interests, however, prove to be quite different, focused on details that were of relevance primarily for herself and the other people involved in the theft. These are details of such little importance to the royal politics that it comes as a surprise that Helene even included them here, if she truly intended her account for King Ladislaus only, as Maya Bijvoet Williamson and others have argued.⁴² At one point during the preparation for the theft, for instance, a problem occurred because some servants of the ladies-in-waiting noticed the files with which the locks were supposed to be opened hidden under the firewood. Helene immediately told her helper about the danger who then almost fainted for fear and quickly removed the tools to another secret place (15/19).

Undoubtedly, the narrator allows us to gain a glimpse into her mind and gives us to understand how she felt during the entire process of breaking into the vault and taking away the Holy Crown. When she suddenly notices, for instance, that the candles that she had procured before have disappeared, she informs us, resorting to the present tense: "vnd ich ge da hin vnd wil im dy kerczn bringen, do waren sew verloren. Do erkam ich also hart, daz ich nicht wessat, was ich tuen solt, vnd wër die sach schier gesaumbt warden allain von des liechts wegen" (15;

⁴¹ See, for example, János Thuróczy's *Latin Chronicle of the Hungarians*, transl. Frank Mantello (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), which was printed in 1488 as: *History of the Hungarian People up to the Rule of King Matthias*; the *Buda-Chronicle*, printed in 1473, was the first chronicle printed in Hungarian and takes us up to 1382; see the foreword to Thuróczy's chronicle by Pál Engel, 6–7.

⁴² Maya Bijvoet Williamson, *The Memoirs*, 58: "it is very likely that it was with the intention to incite King Ladislaus to finally impart to her the rewards promised long ago by his mother, Elizabeth, that Kottanner decided to reveal the details of the theft of the Crown and to recount the precarious circumstances of Ladislaus's birth, baptism and coronation." Indeed, Helene Kottaner might certainly have this purpose in mind, but we would not do justice to her narrative if we argue that it served only financial goals, or royal compensation for past services.

"I go to them and want to bring them the candles, but the candles were gone. I became so afraid that I did not know any more what to do, and the whole undertaking almost failed only because we had no light," 29).

It would be erroneous to recognize here a typically female language and interest, only because Helene was the one to make all the necessary arrangements and therefore was near a nervous breakdown.⁴³ On the contrary, as she confirms herself, even in times of crises, she pulls herself together and makes every effort to find a pragmatic solution: "Da bedacht ich mich vnd gieng vnd wekchat die frawn haimleich auf, die mier die kerczen het geben, vnd sagt ier, die kerczen wëren verloren, vnd ich hiet nach vil zepetten" (15; "I came to my senses and went and secretly awakened the woman who had given me the candles, and I told her that the candles were gone and that I still had much praying to do," 29).

V. The Literary Dimension

Helene's account never conveys the impression of being imaginary, fanciful, unrealistic, or untrue. Moreover, the author does not make any attempts either to minimize her own role in all these events, or to aggrandize herself excessively. In particular, she does not aim for the grandiose perspective of a traditional chronicler who would have utilized the opportunity to examine the specific political situation on a more global level and would also have related the historical, secular events with the divine dimension. Undoubtedly, Helene reflects a profound belief in God, but her narrative is always oriented directly toward herself, Queen Elizabeth, and the other members of her court as she knew them on a day-to-day basis.

Nevertheless, we can also discover a trend toward the fictional in these *Denkwürdigkeiten*. While Helene was waiting for the Hungarian and his helper to open all locks and to secure the Holy Crown, her mind was filled with many imaginations, as she thought that the Castellan and his men must have heard the noises: "arbatat vast an den andern slossen, daz das slahen vnd feillen veberlaut was" (16; "they worked so hard on the other locks, that the sounds of their hammering and filing could be heard distinctly," 30). But she trusts in God: "dennoch het got der almoechtig Ir aller oren verschopt, daz sein ir kainer nicht horat" (16; "surely God Almighty would have stopped their ears to prevent them from hearing anything," 30).

⁴³ Maya Bijvoet Williamson, *The Memoirs*, 7, tends to read too much into Helene's account, especially when she suggests that "[h]er story . . . has an unmistakable feminine focus, bespeaking the observing eye and sensibility of a woman."

Whereas traditionally medieval sources talk about religious fears associated with the afterlife, here we come across a most remarkable example of individual fear representative of an individual's apprehension that she might be caught in this illegal act. Consequently, Helene resorted to her devotional practice: "ich knyeat nider mit grasser andacht vnd pat hincz got vnd hincz vnser lieben frau, daz Si mir vnd meinen helfëren bei gestuenden" (16; "I kneeled down in deep devotion and prayed to God and to Our Dear Lady, that they might assist me and my helpers," 30).⁴⁴ In fact, Helene fell into a kind of psychosis while waiting, hearing loud noises and rumbles at the various doors, although, as she subsequently has to realize, all of this had happened only in her head: "Do erschrakht ich als hart, daz ich vor angsten alle ziteren vnd swiczen ward, vnd gedacht, es wër nicht ain gespenst. . . . Do ich an dye tuer kam, do hort ich nyemant" (16; "This frightened me so much that my entire body began to shake with fear and I broke into a cold sweat. . . . And when I arrived at that door, I heard no one," 30).

Why would she tell her audience all these little details which have practically no significance for the chronicler? Whom does she really tell about her imaginations and fright? Finally, who would be interested in her personal experiences? Helene states, for instance, "Do was ich fra vnd dankcht got, vnd gie wider an mein gepet vnd gedacht mir wol, daz es der tewfel wër vnd die sach gern vnderstanden hiet" (16; "Then I was relieved and thanked God and resumed my prayers once more and said to myself that it surely was the Devil, who would have liked to foil our plan," 30–31). As Horst Wenzel has correctly pointed out, for Helene the entire plan to steal the crown was an action on behalf of God to fight against evil and to allow good to be victorious because it would have been His will to see the crown in Elisabeth's hand.⁴⁵

Several observations quickly come to mind, one being that here we are not dealing with a chronicle in the narrow sense of the word, although Helene offers much information about concrete historical events, almost always accurate and verifiable. Next, the author created a highly unique "literary document" in which she combines a fairly straightforward factual account about the events concerning

⁴⁴ Neither Jean Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur: La culpabilisation en Occident* (Paris: Fayard, 1963), nor Peter Dinzelbacher, *Angst im Mittelalter. Teufels-, Todes- und Gotteserfahrung: Mentalitätsgeschichte und Ikonographie* (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna, and Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1996), have considered this type of fear in the Middle Ages.

⁴⁵ Horst Wenzel, "Die denkwürdigen Erfahrungen der Helene Kottannerin (1439–1440) am Hof der Königin Elisabeth von Ungarn (1409–1442)," orig. 2002, here quoted from id., *Höfische Repräsentation: Symbolische Kommunikation und Literatur im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 270–92; here 278–79.

herself and Queen Elizabeth with many introspective reflections, comments, and, above all, an account of her feelings, fears, and apprehensions.⁴⁶

A good example can be found in the middle of her *Memoirs* where she relates Elizabeth's possible change of mind regarding the Crown long after Helene had stolen it on her behalf. Being afraid to anger her cousin, Lord Ladislaus, the Ban, if he were to find out that the crown was already in Elizabeth's hands, and believing that she could count on the good-will of the Hungarian Magnates after all, the Queen suddenly suggested to return the crown to the castle Plintenburg. Helene's response powerfully proves the point that her account only borrows elements from the chronicle, but ultimately must be characterized as a near-literary narrative:

Do ich das hort, do erkam ich also hart, das ich in allen meinen gliedern enphand, daz sich der muet der weisen frawn also verkert het, vnd gedacht mir wol, daz es ain einplasen von dem tewfel wër. Vnd ich mocht nicht lenger peitten, vnd gab ir ain antburt aus zoren, vnd sprach also: "Fraw, do lasst von, des tuen ich nicht vnd wag mein leben inn solcher mass nicht mer vnd rat auch dar zue nicht, es ist albeg in der stauden pesser denn in dem stokch. Widergeben kombt ir albeg wol, der yczund ewr frueundt ist, der moecht villeicht darnach ewr veindt werden (24).

[When I heard this, I was so shaken by my wise lady's change of heart that I felt it in all my limbs, and I thought by myself that this must be an idea inspired by the Devil. I could hardly control myself and answered angrily and spoke as follows: "Woman, stop that! I will not do it and will not risk my life like that and will not even help you with advice, for it is always better to be in the bushes than in the stocks. You can always return it later, but whoever is your friend now may well become your enemy later", 39].

Again, an official chronicler would have most certainly refrained from relating this outburst of anger on his/her own part. Moreover, it seems very unlikely that the author of a "factual" account pertaining to such ponderous events would have reflected on such an inconsequential, highly personal exchange between the queen and her lady-in-waiting. Finally, and this only confirms what we have observed before, Helene's strong rejection of any insinuation to return the crown to its original site indicates that she indeed enjoyed the role of the royal confidant and could afford to speak with such open words to her Lady. The narrator realizes herself that she might have overstepped her boundaries, but apparently Queen Elizabeth took her chamber maid's outburst as meant for her best self-interest: "Da

⁴⁶ Dorothea Klein, "Durchbruch einer neuen Gattung: Volkssprachige Weltchroniken bis 1300," *Eine Epoche im Umbruch. Volkssprachliche Literaturität 1200–1300. Cambridge Symposium 2001*, ed. Christa Bertelsmeier-Kierst and Christopher Young, together with Bettina Bildhauer (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003), 73–90, limits herself to thirteenth-century chronicles, but observes the combination of fictional with factual elements in these texts as well.

das die edel KungInn horat, daz ich ier aus zoren also groebleich het geantburt, do swaigr Si stil, vnd sprach weder Ja noch nain vnd gieng also von mier vngeantbuertt, vnd redat auch furbas aus den sachen nicht mer mit mier" (24; "When the noble queen heard me answer her so rudely, out of anger, she kept silent and said neither yes nor no and left me thus, without receiving an answer to her question, and also later she never talked to me about it again," 39).

If we return to the point of Helene's account when she and her helper had successfully taken the crown out of the vault and prepared their departure, another valuable aspect comes to the foreground. An old woman who was supposed to be released of her service at court reports to Helene that she found strange objects lying in front of the stove. Helene realizes that these are parts of the casing for the crown and secretly throws them all into the fire. But then she wants to avoid that the old woman might start talking about these parts, and consequently Helene takes her with her on their journey to Komorn where Queen Elizabeth was waiting for them. All the other ladies-in-waiting are surprised and do not understand the change of plan, until Helene informs them "das wolt ich vber mich nemen, vnd wolt ier ain phruent gen Wienn hincz sand Merten erpiten von meiner frawn gnaden, als ich es dann tet" (17; "that I had taken it upon myself to try and obtain from the queen a position for her at St. Martin's in Vienna, as indeed I did," 31). Remarkably, whereas the author enjoys Elizabeth's full confidence, she herself acts almost completely all by herself, except for the Hungarian man, and has to hide everything from the entire entourage. Not surprisingly, Helene was deeply filled with fear when they left the Plintenburg and escaped with the crown:

ich sach dennoch offft vmb, ob vns yemant nach kēm, mein sargt die nam nicht gar ain ende, vnd het vil gedankchen, vnd ward mich wuender nemen, was got getan het, oder noch tuen wolt (17–18).

[I kept looking back frequently for fear that anyone might be following us. Indeed, I worried incessantly, and thoughts were crowding in my mind, and I marveled at what God had done or might still do, 32].

These *Memoirs* certainly represent a historical account, but as memoirs they are focused both on the major political circumstances and events and Helene's highly individualized perspectives, responses, fears, and aspirations. This most idiosyncratic phenomenon finds an excellent expression later in the account after the royal heir has been born and Helene spends time alone with the Queen. Utilizing this unique opportunity, she implores Elizabeth to remember the invaluable service that she rendered her and begs her for some reward, although she couches her request in an entirely religious context: "'gnedige fraw, ewr gnad hat got zu dankchen, die weil ier lebt, vmb die grossen gnaden vnd wunder, die got der almoechtig geburcht hat, daz der Kung vnd die heilig kran in ainer stund

sind zu einander komen" (20; "your grace must thank God as long as you live for the great mercy and the miracle which God Almighty has bestowed on us by bringing the king and the Holy Crown together within the same hour," 34–35).⁴⁷

Although Helene mostly provides us with a factual account throughout the entire text, she also does not hesitate to relate her fears and dreams in surprisingly passionate fashion:

Vnd sunder ain nacht trawmbt mier wie ain fraw durch gancze maur wër in das gewelb gangen vnd hiet die heilig kran her aus genomen. Do erkam ich hart vnd stuend pald auf, vnd nam ain Junkchfraun, genant die Dachpekchinn mit mier, vnd giengen zu dem gwelb (18).

[One night in particular, I dreamed that a woman had penetrated through the wall into the vault and carried off the Holy Crown. I was terrified and got up right away and took a maid of honor, whose name is Dachpeck, with me to the vault, 32].⁴⁸

Her dreams, however, are taken very seriously, such as when she dreams, at a later point, "wie die heilig kron wër in ain katlaken gevallen, Also daz Si voller fleckh wër worden" (32; "that the Holy Crown had fallen into a dirt pit and was full of stains," 49). Once she has told her Lady about it, the latter immediately went to see the crown and to make sure that the dream's prophecy had not come true (32; 49).

Helene's considerable narrative skills are confirmed by her enormous ability to operate with quite different levels of discourses in very close proximity to each other. Whereas at one point she relates the first dream, soon thereafter she comes back to her account about the journey to Komorn at night crossing the Danube where one of the coaches suddenly breaks into the ice. Whereas most of their company screamed and let chaos rule, Helene emerges, although through the lens of her own account, as the most organized and energetic person, particularly because she was most concerned about losing the crown and not about her own life: "Do nam ich die HerczogInn aus der Slesy vnd die pestenn Junkchfrauen zu mier auf den Sliten, vnd kamen mit der hilff gotes vber das eys, vnd auch die andern all" (18; "Then I took the duchess from Silezia (sic) and the highest-ranking ladies into my sled, and with the help of God we made it safely across the ice, and all the others did too," 32–33). Immediately following the author reflects upon her own account and that she would have loved to tell Queen Elizabeth all the details,

⁴⁷ Maya Bijvoet Williamson, *The Memoirs*, 35, note 41, emphasizes that this general religious formula positively contrasts with the expression of greediness by the mid-wife who had 'grossly' demanded, holding the new-born child in her hands: "'if you grant me whatever I ask for, I will tell you what I have here in my hands'" (34). This reading seems to misunderstand the ritual performance of the midwife and the religiously couched expression by Helene.

⁴⁸ Although this short account does not seem to fit into the chronological sequence, it still plays an important part in Helene's presentation because it heightens the dramatic aspect of the events and sheds particular light on the effects they had on her personally.

which, however, never was possible: "vnd ist auch also gestorben, daz Si sein ny Inn ist worden" (18; "she died before she had the opportunity to learn of it," 33). Filled both with pride about her own accomplishments and with devotion to God who helped her to achieve her goals, Helene obviously felt deprived of a great opportunity to relate all details and to embellish them according to her religious sentiments. In other words, here she reflects upon her own narrative interests and reveals the motivations that led her to write or dictate the entire account many years later.⁴⁹

Shortly thereafter, when Helene focuses on the very moment of the Queen's delivery of her son, she incorporates many direct quotes to highlight the dramatic scene and to let us participate in the actual events. Whereas one of the midwives, Margret, does not want to get up from bed and moans: "'Heiliges krewcz, well wir heint ain kynd gewynnen, well wier wënich morgen gen Prespurk farn'" (19; "Holy Cross, if we have a child today, there will be little chance that we go to Pressburg tomorrow," 34), the Queen yells out loud in her despair: "'wo ist die Margret?'" (19; "'Where is Margret?,'" 34), and then: "'get pald hin wider vnd haisst Si komen, es ist nicht schymph dapey'" (19; "'Hurry back to her and tell her to come. This is no joke,'" 34). Once, however, the baby boy is born, Helene returns to her usual calm narrative style, but here with the additional grave tone of voice underscoring the historical and spiritual significance of this birth for Hungary. Because of the significance of this statement, I repeat it here one more time: "In derselben stuend, als die heiligen kron von der Plintenburg kam zu Gamaren, in deselbigen stuend do ward kung Lasla geboren" (19; "Within the same hour in which the Holy Crown arrived from Plintenburg in Komorn, within that same hour King Lászlá was born," 34).

Significantly, in this context Helene does not refer to herself so as not to undermine the gravitational weight of her statement, but still she indirectly places herself in the center of the events without mentioning her own name because it was she who brought the crown to her queen and so to the newborn king. Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to characterize Helene as self-centered or pompous because she knows exactly where to draw the line between the social classes and makes sure that she does not overstep it. When asked whether she would agree to serve as the little boy's godmother, she deliberately steps back and makes way for Lady Margit, wife of Ladislaus Pelóczy, nephew of the Archbishop of Gran: "'Ich bit ewr gnad, ier nembt die Margit aessin'" (20; "I beg your grace, take Lady Margit," 35).

Although Helene voluntarily declined this honor, she remained a very close advisor to the queen and seemed to have been able to read her thoughts. When some of the Hungarian magnates flatly refused ever to accept the new-born son

⁴⁹ *Die Denkwürdigkeiten*, ed. Karl Mollay, 91–92.

as their king, even if he were already ten years old “Wenn er moecht vns den tuercken nicht vorgesein” (22; “because he could not lead us against the Turks,” 38), Queen Elizabeth experienced great disappointment. As the narrator tells us, however, “tet doch nynnndert dem gleich, vnd gieng zu rat mit iren freund graf Vreichen von Zily vnd andern ieren getreuen Räten, wie Sie sich da entgegen halten” (23; “she did not show her true feelings to anyone and sought the advice of her friend, Count Ulrich Cillei, and of other loyal advisors to see what their position was in this matter,” 38). Who are these “other loyal advisors” and how would Helene have known what Elizabeth’s true feeling were? Even though Helene does not say so, the entire context confirms that she was the one with whom Elizabeth conferred and with whom she shared her personal reactions. As the subsequent account informs us, the queen proceeded very secretly and energetically: “Da gieng die edel Kunginn gar stil vnd weisleich mit den sachen vmb” (23; “the noble queen handled this question very discreetly and wisely,” 38), but obviously not without any consultations, which again, by implications, could only mean consultations with Helene. Only later does the author lift the veil and illustrate what actually happened behind the closed doors when she relates how Elizabeth came to her and asked her what to do with the Holy Crown: “Vnd nam mich in ier gehaim vnd sprach zu mier also” (23; “she secretly took me aside and spoke to me as follows,” 39). Not surprisingly, shortly thereafter Helene was assigned the job to prepare the coronation clothing for the young boy without anybody else knowing about it: “dy muest ich in der Capellen haymleich machen, mit versperrrter tuer” (24; “I had to make them secretly, in the chapel, behind locked doors,” 40).

V. The Factual and the Fictional

The dominant character of Helene’s *Memoirs* consists of the almost seamless combination of purely factual narrative with personal reflections. Moreover, the author easily shifts from an account in which the political events and the major figures involved in the coronation process assume center position, to an account where suddenly her own personal functions are highlighted. During the journey from Komorn to Stuhlweissenburg, for instance, Helene accompanies the royal family, riding next to the cradle. At first she informs us in detail who all the nobles were who accompanied the train, and describes the entire arrangements. When the baby began to cry and no longer wanted to stay in the cradle, however, the narrative quickly shifts to Helene: “Vnd ich stuend von dem phërde vnd trueg in an dem armb. Vnd het vast geregent, daz es poes zu geen was” (25; “So I stepped down from my horse and carried him in my arms. It rained so hard that I had trouble walking”, 41). Upon their arrival in Stuhlweissenburg, the author gained

even more public attention because she had to hold little Ladislaus in her arms and had to walk into a wide circle of armored men who then accompanied both into the center of town:

do muest ich, elena Kottannerinn den Jungen Kung tragen, Vnd graf Bartthalome von Krabaten der gieng mier an der ainen seitten Vnd ain annderer an der[se] anndern seitten Vnd weisaten mieh dem edeln kung zu eren vnd giengen also durch die Stat vncz inn die herberg (26).

[I, Helene Kottanner, had to carry the young king, with on one side Count Bartholomeus of Croatia and on the other side someone else, and both accompanied me in honor of the noble king, 42].

Significantly, the author here mentions her whole name, emphasizing the pride with which she assumed these tasks. Moreover, Helene consciously mentions her role as the baby's caretaker: "do stuend ich frue auf vnd padat den edelen kung vnd richtat in zu, als ich pest mocht" (26; "I rose early and bathed the noble king and prepared him as well as I could," 42). Immediately following, however, the narrative shifts again to the public events, with the Queen entering the coronation church going through an old ritual involving the townspeople. Yet, when the boy is knighted, it is Helene once again who steps into the limelight, at least as she describes it in her first-person account:

Da nam ich elena Kottannerinn den Kung an meinen armb. Vnd da nam der von der Freinstat das Swert in die Hant vnd slueg den Kung zu Ritter, vnd mas Im die sleg wol, daz ich sein wol enphand an dem armb (27).

[Then I, Helene Kottanner, took the king in my arms, and the Lord of Freistadt took the sword in his hand and made the king a knight, but he hit him so hard with the sword that I could feel the blow in my arm, 43].

Even during the most important ritual, the coronation, it is no one else but Helene who holds the baby, which motivates her to alert her readers quite self-consciously to this important role: "Da nue der edel kung Lassla gekroenet ward an sand Steffans altar an meinem armm, do trug ich den edlen Kung an einem klainen stieglein auf, ain Hoech, als da gewonhait ist" (27; "When the noble King Lászlá had been crowned in my arms at the altar of Saint Stephen, I carried the noble king up a small flight of stairs to a platform, as is the tradition there," 44).

Undoubtedly, as the author reveals to us, the coronation scene represented the highlight of her life because she gained more recognition than ever before, particularly because Queen Elizabeth stayed in the background and allowed Helene to assume center stage:

Vnd die edel KungInn die erat Ieren Sun als hoch Vnd was als diemuetig, daz ich armme fraw desselbigen tags muest vor iren gnaden gen zu aller nagst bey dem edelen kunig, Darumb daz ich sein gnad zu der heiligen salbung vnd kronung an meinem arm het gehalden (28).

[And the noble queen felt such awe for her son and was so meek, that I, humble woman, had priority over her grace that day and was to remain closest to the noble king, because I had held his grace in my arms during his holy anointment and coronation, 44].

Whereas nobody knew how the Holy Crown had gotten to Stuhlweissenburg, which deprived the author of the fame due to her because of her brave act of stealing the crown, here she was asked to step forward into the center of the public ceremony. Despite her use of a humility formula, Helene presents herself as the key person who had made Ladislaus's coronation possible. As we know from her own account, it was possible not only because she functioned as his nurse, but also because she had secured the crown for him as the future ruler. Consequently, the narrative account serves both as a literary monument to her personal achievements and as a reminder to future readers how much she, Helene, had played the crucial part in this significant political process.

The *Memoirs* are a document both of the author's bold actions on the Plintenburg and an impressive reflection of her dominant function as the queen's confidant. Helene thinks both of the well-being of Hungary under Hapsburgian rule and of her personal career, especially as she approached Elizabeth and requested a reward for her contributions: "Do knyat ich nyder fur die edel Kunginn vnd ward ier gnad manenn an die dienst, die ich iren gnaden, vnd auch dem edelen kung, Vnd auch anderen iren gnaden kinden, dem edelen fuersten gesläch getan hab" (28; "Then I kneeled down in front of the noble queen and reminded her grace of the services I had rendered her grace as well as to the noble king and to her grace's other children, to the entire royal family," 45). In this sense, Helene transgresses a number of genre limitations, as she merges the chronicle with the memoirs, the autobiography with an account of her self-reflections, the confession with the political analysis, and the ghost story with the religious devotional narrative.⁵⁰ Moreover, Helene does not hesitate to offer political commentary, such as when she quotes the young Polish King Wladislaus own words: "'Jch bin doch darumb nicht aus komen, daz ich vechten wolt. Jch bin dar umb aus komen, daz Jch tanczen wolt vnd frolich sein, Wann wër es mein Dingk nicht, so wër es [ains annderen] aber Herczog Albrechts'" (29; "But I did not come out here because I wanted to fight, I came out here because I wanted to dance and make merry, for if I didn't, Duke Albert would," 46). This is then immediately followed by the narrator's interpretation: "Er was darumb nicht aus komen, daz er tannczen wolt, er was darumb auskomen, ob sein not geschëch, daz er durch seins freunds willen sein swert witern wolt, in wagnuss seins lebens" (29; "he had not come because he

⁵⁰ Horst Wenzel, "Zwei Frauen rauben eine Krone," 2002, here cited from the 2005 re-publication, 273–75.

wanted to dance, he had come in case it were necessary for him to wield his sword and risk his life for the sake of his friend," 46).

In the subsequent chapter Helene once again resorts to another register in her narrative. This time she faces a dilemma because Queen Elizabeth needs to find a hiding place for the Holy Crown but is afraid of burying it in the garden—Helene's first suggestion. Consequently, Helene turns to prayer and meditation and so comes up with the best solution for the pragmatic, very earthly problem: "leg wir die heilig kron in die wiegen vnder dem Kung, vnd wo got dem Kung hin pewtt, do k  m die kran auch hin" (30; "let us put the Holy Crown in the cradle underneath the king, and wherever God sends the king, the Crown will go too," 47).

Helene continued to play the most important role in the child's care, particularly during the travel across the countryside to Raab. Significantly, here the narrator places the greatest emphasis on the weather conditions and the child's behavior for whom the travel conditions proved to be very difficult. This, in turn, provides Helene with the ideal opportunity to emphasize her personal efforts in keeping the child dry from the rain, safe from the wind, and then also covered from the intensive sun after the storm. Even though the author does not linger much on the actual travel and does not relate in great detail what route they took and what she observed, she still resorts to the traditional language of the travelogue, placing greatest emphasis on herself as the care-taker and the noble child:

Vnd het ain kuersen mit mier aus gefuert zu meiner notdurft Vnd wann der regen als gras was, so dekchat Ich die kuersen auf die wiegen, vncz daz si vast nas was, so lies ich sy dann ausreiben vnd dekchats dann wider auf die wiegen (31).

[But I had brought along a fur coat in case we should need it in an emergency, and when it rained heavily, I put it over the cradle until it was completely wet, and then I had it rubbed dry and then spread it out over the cradle again, 48].

Other people also realized Helene's importance for the well-being of the royal child, such as when, apart from the royal family and several counts and lords, only she was allowed to enter the castle of Raab: "man lies mir ain klains pruegkelein nyeder, da muest wier eilunde vber gen, das zach man zu hant nach vns auf" (31; "for me they lowered a little bridge, and we had to hurry across it, and they pulled it back up again immediately," 48). Soon thereafter the Queen consulted Helene once again for political advice as she needed to send her son to a safe place and was not happy with the recommendations by her councilors: "vnd sprach: 'gnedige fraw, furt in wo ir wellet, Da er sicher ist, fuert in nur an ain stat, da Ir das heft in der hant habt vnd huett euch vor den Kungen,'" (33; "I said: "Gracious lady, take him wherever you want, but for his sake take him only to a place that is in your hands and beware of the kings'," 50). Although we do not observe a clear change in discourse, the registers vary all the time, depending on the political constellations and Helene's particular involvement in the decision process.

Not surprisingly, before Queen Elizabeth sent her son off to Ödenburg, she had every person, including all the soldiers, swear an oath of loyalty to her. The only exception was Helene: "nuer ich allain swuer nicht, wann ir gnad ain vnuerczweifleichs wolgetraun zu mier het" (33; "I was the only one who didn't, because her grace had complete confidence in me," 50). Other people demonstrated similar respect for her, such as Lord Ulrich of Eitzing who commanded the train taking the young king to safety. When the first place where they were supposed to rest looked suspicious, he approached Helene: "'wie ratier liebe Kottannerinn'" (34; "'What do you advise, dear mother Kottanner?,'" 51). According to the respect paid to her, she assumed the command and told him: "'Wier wellen in tragen, so wir verrist muegen, Vncz daz wir komen, daz wir sicher sein'" (34; "we will carry him [the young prince] as far as we can until we come to a place where we will be safe," 51).

Moreover, Helene also assumed the role of a spokesperson for the poor people whose farm animals the soldiers had taken away for food. Speaking as a political advisor and person of great influence, she almost commanded that the cattle be taken back:

Da sant ich nach dem edelen vnd getreuen heren Vleichen von Eyczing vnd sagt im das vnd pat In, daz er Dar ob wër, daz man den armen leüten ir Viech wider gëb, dar an tet er meiner frauen gnad ain guet wolgeuallen, vnd das wessiet ich wol, wann dy armen leüt heten sich ettleich gehuldigt (34).

[Then I sent a message to the noble and loyal Lord Ulrich of Eitzing and told him this and asked him if he would see to it that these poor people be given their cattle back, that this would greatly please my gracious lady, as I knew very well, for many of these poor people were supporters of the queen, 51].

Surprisingly, Helene could push her decision through, although particularly the German soldiers loudly disagreed with her (34; 52).

Finally, shortly before the end of her account (fragmentary), the author shifts her narrative report once more and addresses her audience directly:

Nu solt ir merkchen, daz desselbigen nachts, als wir komen waren, da kam ain solcher grasz wasser flus, daz kain mensch in der ganczen gegent was, daz ains also aines grossenn wasser flus mocht gedenkchen (35).

[And you should know that on the night of our arrival, there was such a flood that not a single person in the entire area could remember ever having seen such a great rush of water before," 52].

The paragraph concludes with a personal comment about the royal child's long and hard crying at night, which made Helene lose her sleep. In the last paragraph we are informed about the capture of Count Ulrich Cillei and other major dignitaries supporting the Hapsburgian house which meant a serious loss for Queen Elizabeth. Helene adds her own comment: "daz es meines herren vnd

meiner fraun grosser schad wër an lant vnd an lewten" (35; "this meant a great loss of land and people to my lord and lady," 52), thereby indicating her highly developed sense of inclusiveness regarding the lives of the members of the royal house, of the major power players supporting Queen Elizabeth, and even regarding the lives of the poor people.

VI. Conclusion

The combination of the various generic elements might well be the hallmark of her actual literary accomplishments and finds many parallels in contemporary women's literature, such as Margery Kempe's *Book* and Christine de Pizan's *Livre de Cité des Dames*. These *Denkwürdigkeiten* prove to be considerably more than plain memoirs, not to speak of their value as a chronicle. Helene demonstrates that she could freely operate with many different discourses and was always ready to interlace them in an intricate pattern. Her account only seemingly focuses on the larger issues pertaining to the birth of Queen Elizabeth's son and his coronation.

The theft of the crown might have been of minor significance in the larger schema of political events, but Helene's interest as a narrator is entirely centered on how she herself planned the theft, organized the operation, and then transported it secretly out of the castle Plintenburg. The same phenomenon is noticeable throughout the entire narrative, as the author skillfully interweaves her personal thoughts, feelings, reactions, and observations into the political and chronicle discourse.

Helene's *Memoirs* prove to be both factual and literary in nature insofar as she allows the widest range of discourse registers to come into play. They are literary not in the sense of showing traces of the fictional, instead in the sense of narratological theory, that is, being the result of an impressive command of various genres, narrative strategies, personal reflections, and factual accounts. Helene's *Denkwürdigkeiten* certainly deserve to be counted among the noteworthy achievements by late-medieval German women writers. She had as much to say to posterity as Hildegard von Bingen, Mechthild von Magdeburg, and the contributors to the *Sisterbooks*, though not inspired by a vision of the Godhead. Her seemingly mundane, down-to-earth account shares many stylistic, rhetorical, and personal elements with Margery Kempe's *Book* because she felt important, because had experienced something most extraordinary, and because she knew that her narrative would appeal to her readers. Neither woman relied on a traditional genre, but their texts are certainly of a significant literary quality through their dexterous play with images, metaphors, comparisons, analogies, allusions, and, most important, through their full command of numerous literary registers. Their texts are not fictional, but they definitely made major contributions to the literary

discourse of their time. They are, however, not specifically female texts, idiosyncratic and indicative of an *écriture féminine*, or interesting to us because they were written by women. Sara S. Poor approvingly cites Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff that “we study literature by women not because of that it says about women’s nature or essence, but because it *should say* something *to all* about humanity and human history.”⁵¹ The same can and must be claimed for the authors of the *Sisterbooks*, Margery Kempe, and Helene Kottanner.⁵²

⁵¹ Sara S. Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book*, 200.

⁵² See also my study: “Literary or Not? The Fictionality Debate in Autobiographical Writings by a Fifteenth-Century German Woman Writer: Helene Kottanner’s *Memoirs*,” *Medieval Perspectives* 19 (2006): 64–90.

Chapter Ten

Sixteenth-Century Cookbooks, *Artes* Literature, and Female Voices:

Anna Weckerin (Keller) and Sabina Welser¹

I. A Sixteenth-Century Cookbook

The Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel, Germany, houses a most interesting copy of an early-modern cookbook by Anna Wecker, first published in 1597. Its full title reads: *Ein Koestlich new KOchbuch: Von allerhand Speisen / an Gemuesen / Obs / // Fleisch / Gefluegel / Wildpret / Fischen // vnd Gebachens. // Nicht allein vor Gesunde: sondern auch vnd fuernemb= // lich vor Krancke / in allerley Kranckheiten vnd Gebraesten: auch Schwangere Weiber / Kindbetterinnen / vnd ale schwache Leute / kuenstlich vnd nuetzlich zuzurichten vnd zu gebrauchen* (Wolfenbüttel 7.1 Oec).² In English the title translates as: *A Delightful³ New Cookbook: Of many kinds of meals consisting of vegetables, fruit, meat, poultry, game, fish, and pastries. Not only for healthy people, but also and especially for infirm people who suffer from various sicknesses and weaknesses, and also for pregnant women, post-partum women, and other people inflicted by some illness. These recipes can be prepared in an artistic manner and are useful as well.* Anna Wecker identifies herself by the name of her first husband, Johann Jacob Wecker, but uses, as was common at her time, the female suffix -in for her name, Weckerin. To avoid the confusion of names, here I will refer to her by the name used in her printed work, Weckerin.

Weckerin's name has remained practically unknown both in German medieval and early-modern studies, and —surprisingly— in the area of culinary literature (cookbooks).⁴ Her voice, however, and her contribution to this genre, are

¹ I would like to thank Karen Pratt, King's College London, for her kindness to read an early draft of this chapter and to offer critical comments.

² For technical reasons I have transcribed the superscripta into regular diphthongs representing the umlaut in German.

³ "Koestlich" actually means 'delicious,' and refers to the taste of the recipes.

⁴ We find no references to her in the otherwise excellent studies and literary histories: Barbara Becker-Cantarino's *Der lange Weg zur Mündigkeit. Frau und Literatur (1500–1800)* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987); *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*, ed. by Gisela Brinker-Gabler. Vol. 1: *Vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Beck, 1988); *An Encyclopedia of Continental Women Writers*, ed. Katharina

significant enough to include a critical investigation of her text in this collection of studies on medieval and early-modern women's voices. Keller also published a marriage song, and might have produced additional texts, but at this point not much else is known about her literary and practical creativity. The same applies to Sabina Welser and her cookbook from 1553, though her work has attracted somewhat more attention both by scholarship and the general public interested in older recipes.⁵

The following study focuses on these two important female authors and argues that we need to incorporate culinary texts into our examination of women's contribution to the culture (and literature) of their time. If it was indeed true that women suffered a considerable marginalization in medieval and early-modern history and had few opportunities to participate in the creation of fictional literature and *artes* literature,⁶ then we must pay particular attention to any effort by female writers to find a niche of their own, in such genres as the letter, religious poetry, and also the cookbook.⁷

M. Wilson. 2 vols. (New York and London: Garland, 1991); Heide Wunder, *"Er ist die Sonn", sie ist der Mond*. *Frauen in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich: Beck, 1992); *Frauen Literatur Geschichte: Schreibende Frauen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*. 2nd, compl. rev. ed. by Hiltrud Gnüg and Renate Möhrmann (1985; Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999); when I published my *Frauen in der deutschen Literaturgeschichte. Die ersten 800 Jahre. Ein Lesebuch*. Ausgewählt, übersetzt und kommentiert von Albrecht Classen. *Women in German Literature*, 4 (New York, Washington, D.C., et al.: Peter Lang, 2000), I was not yet aware of women's contribution to the genre of cookbooks. See, however, Sabine Hopf, "Lexikalische Studien zur Sprache in Kochbüchern des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit," diss. Ph.D., Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 1991, who has extensively utilized Anna Keller's (Wecker's) cookbook for her lexicological investigations. Her dissertation, in which she also offers a linguistic study of *Die Kuchenmaysterey* (first printed in Nuremberg: Peter Wagner, 1485, last published in 1647), has now appeared in print: Sabine Bunsmann-Hopf, *Zur Sprache in Kochbüchern des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit: ein fachkundliches Wörterbuch*. Würzburger medizinhistorische Forschungen, 80 (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003). Recently a digital edition of this text has been made available, see *alo austrian literature online*: http://www.literature.at/webinterface/library/ALO-BOOK_V01?objid=13466&page=1&ocr=&zoo m=5 (last accessed on Feb. 23, 2007).

⁵ Sabine Freund, *Das vokalische Schreibsystem im Augsburger Kochbuch der Sabina Welserin aus dem Jahre 1553: ein Beitrag zur Graphematik handschriftlicher Überlieferung des 16. Jahrhunderts*. Sprache, Literatur und Geschichte, 6 (Heidelberg: Winter 1991).

⁶ Barbara Becker-Cantarino, *Der lange Weg*, 1987, 202–32; from a social-historical perspective, see Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household. Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg*. Oxford Studies in Social History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); for a very different perspective, see Albrecht Classen, *Late-Medieval German Women Poets: Secular and Religious Poems*, transl. from the German with Introduction, Notes, and Interpretive Essay (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 2004).

⁷ Albrecht Classen, 'Mein Seelfang an zu singen'. *Religiöse Frauenlieder des 15.–16. Jahrhunderts. Kritische Studien und Textedition*. Studies in Spirituality, Supplement, 6 (Leuven, Paris, and Sterling, VA: Peeters, 2002); for women's correspondence, especially in the Middle Ages, see Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex. Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts*. Women of Letters

II. The Genre of Medieval Cookbooks

In order to contextualize Anna Weckerin's and Sabina Welser's cookbooks and to shed light on their relevance both for the history of German literature and women's voices in premodern times, I will first survey the historical development of the medieval cookbook, then cull all the presently available biographical knowledge about Weckerin and Welser from the few resources for early-modern female authors, and finally turn to their cookbooks as valuable documents of women's writings and women's self-awareness as writers.

Two premises need to be considered before we examine the texts and their context in greater detail. First, cookbooks represent a special genre within the wide array of late-medieval and early-modern text production. They are instructional books and at first sight do not have much in common with (fictional) literature.⁸ Nevertheless, as part of the learned, or factual, literature (*Sachliteratur*),⁹ they deserve to be included in the canon of *artes* literature, which fundamentally includes the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic), the *quadrivium* (mathematics, arithmetic, geometry, and music), the mechanical *artes* (geography, medicine, botany, dietetics), necromancy, or *artes magicae*, and law.¹⁰ Increasingly, some scholars such as Joachim Telle argue against drawing a rigid demarcation line between cookbooks and literature in the broader sense of the word, and have identified the genre of the cookbook as a cultural-historical phenomenon.¹¹

(Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 10–35; for a sweeping overview of late-medieval concepts about womanhood, women's contributions to literature, and the public debate concerning women, now see Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman*. Vol. II: *The Early Humanist Reformation, 1250–1500* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002). She does not, however, deal with any *artes* literature.

⁸ For an excellent discussion of foodstuff, food preparation, and the culture of eating in the Middle Ages, see Paul B. Newman, *Daily Life in the Middle Ages* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Company, 2001), 3–36; see also Melitta Weiss Adamson, *Food in Medieval Times*. Food through History (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 2004).

⁹ William Crossgrove, *Die deutsche Sachliteratur des Mittelalters*. Germanistische Lehrbuchsammlung, 63 (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 1994), 9–17.

¹⁰ Hans Rupprich, *Die deutsche Literatur vom späten Mittelalter bis zum Barock*. Zweiter Teil: Das Zeitalter der Reformation, 1520–1570. Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, 4/2 (Munich: Beck, 1973), 392–455; George Fenwick Jones, "Fachschrifttum," *Europäisches Spätmittelalter*, ed. Willi Erzgräber. Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft, 8 (Wiesbaden: Athenaion, 1978), 645–55; curiously, neither Rupprich nor Jones consider cookbooks, although they certainly belong to the *artes* literature as well.

¹¹ Joachim Telle, "Geschichte der Medizin und Pharmazie: Das Rezept als literarische Form – Bausteine zu einer Kulturgeschichte," *Medizinische Monatsschrift* 28 (1974): 389–95; see also Melitta Weiss Adamson's insightful study of the didactic poem *Das Gnaistlin* (late thirteenth or early fourteenth century), "Gula, Temperantia, and the *Ars Culinaris* in Medieval Germany," *Nu lôn ich iu der gâbe. Festschrift for Francis G. Gentry*, ed. Ernst Ralf Hintz. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 693 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 2003), 107–18.

Barbara Newman even called for bridging the traditional divide between history and literature and to accept all texts in their functional, or narrative purpose, as relevant for the gender discourse and women's attempt to come to terms with their own existence through the written word.¹² In this sense, as she argues, even male-authored texts can shed important light on women's position within their society.¹³

Surprisingly, Hans Rupprich does not hesitate to dedicate a whole chapter in his second volume of *Vom späten Mittelalter bis zum Barock* to *artes* literature, didactic literature, emblematic literature, chronicle literature, scientific literature, art literature, military literature, medical literature, and even magical and oneiric literature, but he does not consider cookbooks as relevant for his consideration—perhaps simply an oversight on his part, but perhaps also a deliberate choice of questionable justification.¹⁴ By contrast, cultural historians have happily welcomed the cookbook as a highly important source of information both about basic elements of daily life and about concepts of aristocratic culture and festivities versus the lifestyle of the lower social classes.¹⁵ Thomas Gloning deserves particular mention because he is in charge of a new research project in which he analyzes cookbooks as important sites of text production, written communication, and the combination of various textual functions. Moreover, he also examines cookbooks as relevant databases for historical linguistics, for the investigation of medieval and early-modern concepts of translation, and of textual structures, such as elements of descriptions.¹⁶ Although William Crossgrove alerts us to the problematic nature of “Sachliteratur” (non-fictional literature), he firmly

¹² Barbara Newman, “On the Ethics of Feminist Historiography,” *Exemplaria* 2, 2 (1990): 702–06; here 705.

¹³ Newman, “On the Ethics of Feminist Historiography,” 705.

¹⁴ Hans Rupprich, *Die deutsche Literatur vom späten Mittelalter bis zum Barock*, 392–455.

¹⁵ Hans Wiswe, *Kulturgeschichte der Kochkunst: Kochbücher und Rezepte aus zwei Jahrtausenden*, mit einem lexikalischen Anhang zur Fachsprache von Eva Hepp (Munich: Moos, 1970); *Das Kochbuch des Mittelalters: Rezepte aus alter Zeit*, eingeleitet, erläutert und ausprobiert von Trude Ehlert (1990; Zürich: Artemis, 1991). More recent studies, such as Ernst Schuberts *Alltag im Mittelalter. Natürliches Lebensumfeld und menschliches Miteinander* (Darmstadt: Primus, 2002), again completely overlook ‘foodstuff’ and ‘food preparation,’ hence also the cookbook as important aspects of late-medieval culture, see my review of Schubert’s book, forthcoming in *Mediaevistik*; see also Richard van Dülmen, *Kultur und Alltag in der Frühen Neuzeit*. Vol. 1: *Das Haus und seine Menschen*, 16–18. Jahrhundert (Munich: Beck, 1990), 68–74.

¹⁶ Thomas Gloning, “Textgebrauch und sprachliche Gestalt älterer deutscher Kochrezepte (1350–1800). Ergebnisse und Aufgaben,” *Textsorten deutscher Prosa vom 12./13. bis 18. Jahrhundert und ihre Merkmale. Akten zum Internationalen Kongress in Berlin 20. bis 22. September 1999*, ed. Franz Simmler. *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik. Reihe A. Kongressberichte*, 67 (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2002), 517–50. The problem with his approach, however, lies in the overly extended historical perspective which blurs any differences between medieval cookbooks and those from the eighteenth century. Moreover, he does not consider any cookery book by a female writer.

places it within the academic field of German Studies.¹⁷ The range and depth of vocabulary in the *artes* literature was much more extensive than the vocabulary in the fictional literature throughout the entire Middle Ages and the early modern period, and a close examination easily demonstrates the considerable influence of the *artes* literature on courtly and non-courtly fictional literature.¹⁸ The focus now rests, perhaps once again, on the primary function of texts and their correlation with other texts, and also with their audience and society at large, whereas the question regarding their 'literary' character is losing in relevance.¹⁹ Ria Jansen-Sieben raised the absolutely correct question in this regard: "wat was voor en Middeleeuws publiek *fantasie* een wat was reël?" (what was fantasy and what was reality for a medieval public?). One, most liberal, answer comes from Gundolf Keil, though perhaps biased because of his interest in incorporating the texts from the *artes liberales* and *artes mechanicae* into the corpus of medieval literature at large: "Alles was sich über den Literaturbegriff der Fachprosaforschung sagen läßt, ist, daß er weit ist, so weit wie irgend möglich" (Anything that can be said about the concept of literature in the field of pragmatic texts is that it is wide, as wide as possible).²⁰

Cooking as an art and the cookbook as an important contribution to its teaching, practice, and dissemination did not gain full respect in Germany until the fifteenth century, whereas Arabs and Persians had long treated this as an art by itself.²¹ Since then, however, refined cooking and the corresponding cookbook became an

¹⁷ William Crossgrove, *Die deutsche Sachliteratur*, 14–15: "Das Studium der Sachliteratur als germanistisches Teilgebiet geht von den existierenden Texten aus und versucht, sich in ständigem Kontakt mit den Nachbardisziplinen ein Bild von der historischen Überlieferung zu machen. . . . Diese Perspektiven binden das Studium der Sachliteratur fest in das Gefüge der mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Germanistik, auch wenn es bislang nicht immer im Mittelpunkt gestanden hat." See also the parallel case of books of herbs, Mechthild Habermann, *Deutsche Fachtexte der frühen Neuzeit. Naturkundlich-medizinische Wissensvermittlung im Spannungsfeld von Latein und Volkssprache*. *Studia Linguistica Germanica*, 61 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2001); for the area of medical texts, see Gundolf Keil, "Literaturbegriff und Fachprosaforschung," *Fachprosaforschung. Acht Vorträge zur mittelalterlichen Artesliteratur*, ed. id. and Peter Assion (Berlin: Schmidt, 1974), 183–96.

¹⁸ Sabine Hopf, *Lexikalische Studien zur Sprache in Kochbüchern*, III–IV.

¹⁹ See the contributions to *Text und Kultur: Mittelalterliche Literatur 1150–1450*, ed. Ursula Peters. *Germanische Symposien. Berichtsbände*, 23 (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2001); and *Grenzen der Germanistik: Rephilologisierung oder Erweiterung?*, ed. Walter Erhart. *Germanistische Symposien. Berichtsbände*, 20 (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2004).

²⁰ Ria Jansen-Sieben, *Repertorium van de Middelnederlandse Artes-literatuur* (Utrecht: HES, 1989), XIII; Gundolf Keil, "Literaturbegriff und Fachprosaforschung," *Fachprosaforschung: acht Vorträge zur mittelalterlichen Artesliteratur*, ed. id. and Peter Assion (Berlin: Schmidt, 1974), 183–96. See also Mareike Temmen, *Das 'Abdinghofer Arzneibuch': Edition und Untersuchung einer Handschrift mittelniederdeutscher Fachprosa* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2006), 4–10.

²¹ Ernst Schubert, *Essen und Trinken im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 297–99.

essential aspect of courtly and urban culture. This finds its best expression perhaps in Marx Rumpolt's prologue to his *Ein new Kochbuch* from 1581: "Es haben durchleuchtigste Churf. G. F. zu jeder zeit die verstendigsten Leut Menschlichs Geschlechts / denjenigen / so mit höchstem Ernst den Nachkommen / durch die von Gott jnen verliehene Gaben nützlich und dienlich zu seyn / etwz fruchtbarlichs bey jnen zu schaffen / und also umb die gantz Menschliche Gesellschaft / sich wol zu verdienen unterstanden haben / besonders fürnemmes Lob / unnd zwar nicht vnbillich zugeschrieben." (Your Honorable Duke Elector have always heaped particular praise, indeed not unjustifiably, on the most intelligent members of human society, that is, those who have made, with the help of their God-given talents, useful and helpful contributions to human society as a whole).²²

Whereas early medieval authors mostly looked down on the preparation of foodstuff as a crude and almost vulgar activity, and whereas many didactic writers explicitly warned of gluttony as one of the seven deadly sins,²³ already by the thirteenth century authors were approaching this topic quite differently. Ulrich von Türheim, for instance, in his *Rennewart* (ca. 1250), signaled that he considered food preparation and serving a meal at festive events as an art form. A closer examination of both chronicles and poetic texts demonstrates that food was carefully prepared as an important aspect of courtly festivities from the late Middle Ages onwards.²⁴ And by the mid-fifteenth century the terms "spisekunst" and "spisende kunst" (art of food) can be found in a number of documents.²⁵

The critical issue that requires further investigation concerns the question whether or not cookbooks, recipes, and related texts pertain to the domain of German Studies and whether they can be regarded as textual productions conforming to some generic aesthetic criteria. The answers to these questions

²² Marx Rumpolt, *Ein new Kochbuch: das uff e. grundtl. beschreibung wie man recht u. wol, nicht allein von vierfüssigen, heymischen u. wilden Thieren, sondern auch von mancherley Vögel u. Federwildpret, darzu von allem grünen u. durren Fischwerck, allerley Speiss ... kochen u. zubereiten solle*. Rpt. of the edition Frankfurt a. M. 1581, ed. Manfred Lemmer. 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Edition Leipzig, 1977), Vorrede, 2.

²³ Joachim Bumke, *Höfische Kultur. Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter*. 2 vols. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), 1, 240–47. This criticism does not imply, as Bumke also points out, that aristocratic society refused to enjoy the most elaborate foods; on the contrary, food served at the courts was, to say the least, luxurious, whereas the peasants and merchants had to contend with much less lavish meals. See also Sarah Gordon, "Culinary Comedy in French Arthurian Romance," *Medievalia et Humanistica New Series* 30 (2004): 15–31.

²⁴ Karl Weinhold, *Die deutschen Frauen in dem Mittelalter*. 2 Vols. (Vienna: Carl Gerold's Sohn, 1882), 2, 72–75.

²⁵ Sieglinde Hartmann, "Vom 'vrâz' zum Parnaß. Ein mentalitätsgeschichtlicher Versuch über die Bedeutung der Kochkunst in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit," *Essen und Trinken in Mittelalter und Neuzeit. Vorträge eines interdisziplinären Symposiums vom 10.–13. Juni 1987 an der Justus-August-Liebig-Universität Gießen*, ed. Irmgard Bitsch, Trude Ehlert, and Xenja von Ertzdorff (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1987), 117–25; here 123–25.

depend very much on how German (or any other language) Studies are defined, whether we use a traditional concept limiting ourselves to purely “fictional” literature, or whether we accept a much broader approach which does not postulate an artificial and unhelpful distinction between factual and fictional texts.²⁶ If we include chronicles, didactic texts, instruction books, manuals, sermons, and other non-fictional texts in the canon of late-medieval literature, which many modern scholars do without any hesitations, then there is very little reason to exclude cookbooks.²⁷ Thomas Cramer, however, although he does not hesitate to discuss scientific texts, musical treatises, books on alchemy, calendars, texts on necromancy, medicine books, and law books within the context of late-medieval German literature, does not mention cookbooks at all.²⁸ On the other hand, both the anonymous “König vom Odenwald” (fourteenth century) with his poems on food preparation and related topics,²⁹ and the Constance poet Johannes Wittenwiler with his lengthy discussion of food preparation in his allegorical poem *Der Ring* (ca. 1401)³⁰ demonstrate a noteworthy, though highly complex relationship between a literary text and recipes or cookbooks. Moreover, the symbolic significance of foodstuff and food preparation in traditionally “literary” texts in the Middle Ages cannot be overlooked.³¹

²⁶ See, for instance, Trude Ehlert, “Doch so fülle dich nicht satt! Gesundheitslehre und Hochzeitsmahl in Wittenwilers ‘Ring’,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 109 (1990): 68–85; Melitta Weiss-Adamson, *Medieval Dietetics, Food and Drink in Regimen Sanitatis Literature from 800 to 1400*. German Studies in Canada, 5 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 1995).

²⁷ For further discussions of this complex issue, see *Medieval German Voices in the 21st Century. The Paradigmatic Function of Medieval German Studies for German Studies. A Collection of Essays*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft, 46 (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 2000).

²⁸ Thomas Cramer, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im späten Mittelalter* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990), 121–33.

²⁹ König vom Odenwald, *Gedichte. Mittelhochdeutsch – Neuhochdeutsch*. Mit einer Einleitung zur Klärung der Verfasserfrage, ed. and transl. by Reinhard Olt. Germanische Bibliothek, 4. Reihe: Texte (Heidelberg: Winter, 1988); see also Albrecht Classen, “The Voice from the Kitchen: The Poems by the König vom Odenwald,” *Michigan Germanic Studies* XVII, 1 (1991): 1–16; id., “Der König vom Odenwald, ein mittelhochdeutscher Dichter des späten 14. Jahrhunderts,” <http://archiv.odenwald-bisz.de/menschen/kingodenwald.html> (last accessed on Feb. 23, 2007).

³⁰ Heinrich Wittenwiler, “*Der Ring*,” ed., transl., and commentary by Bernhard Sowinski. Helfant Texte, 9 (Stuttgart: Helfant, 1988); Melitta Weiss-Amer, “Straubs Gesundheitslehre: Wittenwilers *Ring* im Kontext mittelalterlicher Fachliteratur,” *Medieval German Literature. Proceedings from the 23rd International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 5–8, 1988*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 507 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1989), 171–80.

³¹ Albrecht Classen, “The Symbolic Function of Food as Iconic Representation of Culture and Spirituality in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival* (ca. 1205),” to appear in: *Orbis Litterarum*; id., “The Disrupted Dinner in the *Nibelungenlied*: The Development of Tragedy in the Heroic Context Reflected in the Hunt, the Kitchen, Dinner Preparations, Quenched Fires, and Spoiled Banquets,” to appear in: *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*.

The editors of the highly respected *Verfasserlexikon*, at least, incorporated critical articles on the following fifteenth-century cookbooks, hence included them as relevant for the history of late-medieval literature: *Buch von guter Speise*, Eberhard von Landshut's cookbook, the *Kölner Kochbuch*, the *Küchenmeisterei*, the *Mondseer Kochbuch*, the *Mühlberger Kochbuch*, the *Stockholmer Kochbuch*, Thomas van den Noot's cookbook *Notabel Boecxken van Cokeryen*, the *Wolfenbütteler* cookbook, and the cookbook of St. Dorotheen in Vienna.³²

More important, however, than all other criteria, proves to be the fact that Anna Weckerin's cookbook, in notable contrast to many earlier cookbooks, was printed and reprinted many times, obviously appealing to a wider audience far into the seventeenth century, often with additional recipes, such as those edited in 1652, 1667, 1679, and finally in 1697, and it was obviously still known in the eighteenth century.³³ Irrespective of whether we would want to attribute to her *Ein Koestlich new KOchbuch: Von allerhand Speisen* a literary character or not, here we can identify another important female voice within the chorus of late-medieval and early-modern women writers whose contribution to the public learned discourse deserves to be examined in greater detail. This allows us to diversify our approach to women's studies and to include a further area where women authors actually succeeded in making their voices heard and to carve a niche for themselves within the spectrum of *artes* literature.³⁴

The situation of Sabina Welser's cookbook in comparison with Weckerin's was different insofar as it never found its way into print and hence did not experience any noteworthy dissemination. Nevertheless, her text must also be considered as an important contribution by a sixteenth-century woman writer.

³² See, for example, Francis B. Brévert, "Kochbuch von St. Dorotheen zu Wien," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*. 2nd, completely rev. edition by Kurt Ruh et al. Vol. 5 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1985), 1–2; id., "Kochbüchlein von guter Speise," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters*, Vol. 5, 2–3.

³³ The 1679 edition, a copy of which can be found in the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, 14.2 Oec, was printed in Basel by Emanuel König der Jüngere, together with the *Parisische Küchenmeister / Das ist: Jetziger Zeit verleckerte Französische Art undl Manier / Allerhand Speisen bey köstlichen Pancketen und Haußhaltungen zu kochen und zuzurichten* (quoted from the VD 17 online version). It does not seem to have been very unusual for a woman to publish a cookbook by the end of the seventeenth century, as we can find similar examples, such as Eleonore Maria Rosalia, Herzogin von Troppau und Jägerndorf's *Ein gantz neues und nutzbahres Koch-Buch: In welchem Zufinden / wie man verschiedene herrliche und wohl-schmäckende Speisen . . . Sehr künstlich und wohl zurichten . . .* (Vienna: Voigt, 1699); this is contained in her *Freywillig-auffgesprungener Granat-Appfel. Deß Christlichen Samaritans. Oder: Auß Christlicher Lieb deß Nächsten eröffnete Gehaimbnuß / Viler vortrefflichen / sonders bewährten Mitteln und Wunder-haylsamen Artzneyen*. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Xb 32989, and Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, 4 M. med. 66.

³⁴ Ernst Schubert, *Essen und Trinken im Mittelalter*, 298–99.

III. Cookbooks in the History of German Literature

Before we explore this aspect further, let us first examine the history of medieval German cookbooks which, as a genre representing considerable learning and practical experience, emerged fairly late in comparison with French and Italian recipe books by famous cooks and authors such as Guillaume Tirel (nicknamed and better known as Taillevent (ca. 1370), the anonymous composer of the *Menagier de Paris* (end of the fourteenth century),³⁵ Master Chiquart Amiczo (ca. 1420), and Maestro Martino (mid-fifteenth century).³⁶

The earliest German cookbook, the mid-fourteenth-century *Buoch von guoter spise* (Book of Good Meals), was copied down by the famous Würzburg proto-notary Michael de Leone in his *Würzburger Liederhandschrift*, today housed in the Universitätsbibliothek Munich (2^o Cod. Ms 731) on folios 156r–165v.³⁷ Interestingly, this cookbook was integrated into a miscellany with many different types of texts, both literary and factual, and strongly contributes to the creation of a true “Hausbuch” or ‘book for the whole household.’³⁸ It is not unusual to come across miscellanies in the late Middle Ages when text production increased considerably in response to an extensive broadening of the reading audience, which in turn seems to have been interested in the widest range of literary and practical genres. Michael’s collection was followed by the *Kunst, ungarisch und behamisch Essen zu kochen* (1458; *The Art of Cooking Hungarian and Bohemian Food*), and many contemporary guidance books focused on the preparation of wine and medicinal liquors.³⁹ Two major fifteenth-century cookbook authors continued this tradition, Meister Hanns (des von Wirtenberg koch), and Meister Eberhard von

³⁵ Nicole Crossley-Holland, *Living and Dining in Medieval Paris. The Household of a Fourteenth-Century Knight* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996); she convincingly argues in favor of Guy de Montigny, active in the service of the Duke of Berry during the 1370s and 1380s, as the most likely author of this well-known guide book for how to run an entire household.

³⁶ *The Viandier of Taillevent*. An Edition of all Extant Manuscripts, ed. Terence Scully (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988); D. Eleanor Scully, Terence Scully, *Early French Cookery. Sources, History, Original Recipes and Modern Adaptations* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 9–18; Odile Redon, Françoise Sabban, Silvano Serventi, *The Medieval Kitchen. Recipes from France and Italy*, transl. Edward Schneider (1991; Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 3. For a useful bibliography of cooking, cookbooks, and culinary concepts throughout early-modern Europe, see Constance B. Hieatt, Brenda Hosington, and Sharon Butler, *Pleyn Delit. Medieval Cookery for Modern Cooks*. 2nd ed. (1976; Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 163–65.

³⁷ *Das buoch von guoter spise*. Abbildungen zur Überlieferung des ältesten deutschen Kochbuches, eingeleitet und herausgegeben von Gerold Hayer. *Litterae*, 45 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1976).

³⁸ William Crossgrove, *Die deutsche Sachliteratur*, 101–02.

³⁹ Gerhard Eis, *Mittelalterliche Fachliteratur*. 2nd rev. ed. Sammlung Metzler, 14 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1967), 27–28.

Landshut. The former published *Von allerley kochen* (On Various Recipes; Basel, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. A.N.V. 12, 17f–101v), in which he included many suggestions on how to arrange the dinner table in a highly artistic manner, using animal heads and other objects for a whole panoply of theatrical decorations.⁴⁰

Meister Eberhard's text, entitled *Hienach volgt vonn dem kochenn vnd hat gemacht meyster Eberhart ein koch herczog Heinrichs zu landshut* (Here Follows a Book on Cooking, Made by Master Eberhart, a Cook of Duke Henry of Landshut), today housed in the Öttingen-Wallersteinsche Schloßbibliothek zu Harburg, now in Augsburg, dates from the first half of the fifteenth century.⁴¹ The author, who was Master of the Kitchen (Chef, i.e., Chief of the Kitchen) in the service of Duke Henry III the Rich of Bavaria-Landshut, emphasizes the medicinal use of his recipes, some of which were repeatedly copied into several sixteenth-century cookbooks, such as Walther Ryff's *New Kochbuoch für die Krancken* (Frankfurt a. M. 1545; reprinted at least until 1610).⁴²

Johannes Petri printed the first German cookbook in Passau in 1486 under the very appropriate title *Kuchenmeysterey* (Mastery of the Kitchen).⁴³ Several cookbooks originated in monastic convents, such as the *Tegernseer Kochbüchlein* dating from the turn of the century, the *Mondseer Kochbuch*, and the *Wiener Kochbuch* (both late fifteenth century). Many authors focused their interests on the preparation of wine, vinegar, and hard liquors, or included particular chapters on these topics in their cookbooks, such as Marx Rumpolt in his *Ein new Kochbuch*, printed by Sigmundt Feyerabendt in Frankfurt a. M. in 1581 and many times thereafter at least until 1676.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Anita Feyl, "Das Kochbuch Meister Eberhards," *Ostbairische Grenzmarken. Passauer Jahrbuch für Geschichte, Kunst und Volkskunde* 5 (1961): 352–66; *Kochbuch von Meister Hannsen, des von Wirtenberg Koch*, ed. Wilhelm Wackernagel in: *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 9 (1853): 365–73; Trude Ehlert, *Das Kochbuch des Mittelalters*, 21; Meister Hannsen's cookbook has been preserved in a copy from 1460; Meister Eberhard's cookbook has been preserved in a copy from 1495.

⁴¹ W. Hirth, "Die Diätetik des Küchenmeisters Eberhard von Landshut und eine deutsche Regel der Gesundheit nach Arnald von Villanova (sic)," *Ostbairische Grenzmarken* 8 (1966): 273–81; Anita Feyl, *Das Kochbuch Meister Eberhards. Ein Beitrag zur altdeutschen Fachliteratur*. Ph.D. thesis, Freiburg i.Br. 1963; Gundolf Keil, "Eberhart von Landshut," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*. 2nd, completely rev. ed. by Kurt Ruh et al. Vol. 2, 1/2 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1980), 289.

⁴² See Josef Benzing, *Walther H. Ryff und sein literarisches Werk: eine Bibliographie* (Hamburg: E. Hauswedell, 1959); Sabine Hopf, *Lexikalische Studien zur Sprache in Kochbüchern*, X.

⁴³ *Kuchenmeysterey*, ed. Rolf Ehnert. Litterae, 71 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1981); see also *Küchenmeisterei. In Nürnberg um 1490 von Peter Wagner gedruckt*. Faksimile nach dem Exemplar in der Herzog-August-Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, eingeleitet von Hans Wegener. Veröffentlichungen der Gesellschaft für Typenkunde des 15. Jahrhunderts, 3 (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1939)

⁴⁴ Marx Rumpolt, *Ein new Kochbuch, das ist ein gründtliche Beschreibung, wie man recht und wol nicht allein von vierfüßigen, heymischen vnd wilden Thieren . . . allerley Speiß als gesotten, gebraten, gebacken ... kochen und zubereiten solle . . . Auch ist darinnen zu vernemen, wie man herrliche grosse Pancketen . .*

The majority of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century cookbooks have come down to us anonymously, but since the sixteenth century most authors identify themselves by name, such as Balthasar Staindl (Augsburg 1544), Marx Rumpolt (Frankfurt a. M. 1581), Thomas von der Noots (Brussels 1510), Walther Ryff (1545), and Hieronymus Bock (Straßburg 1550).⁴⁵ An unusual case proves to be the Italian cookbook by Bartolomeo Sacchi de Piadena (also known as Platina) (1421–1484), printed in 1474 under the title *De honesta voluptate et valetudine*, which was translated into German by Stephanus Vigilius Pacimontanus in 1542 and printed under the title *Von der Eerlichen / zimlichen / auch erlaubten Wolust des leibs*. Here we can clearly observe the intertextual and intercultural nature of cookbooks. This was followed by Balthasar Staindl's cookbook *Künstlichs vnd nutzlichs Kochbuoch*, printed in Augsburg in 1544, to mention some of the best known cookbooks.⁴⁶

Although specialized research on late-medieval and early-modern cookbooks has made much progress over the last several decades, Anna Weckerin's and Sabina Welser's contributions have hardly provoked any interest,⁴⁷ which has nothing to do with the actual quality of their recipes and the overall design of their collections.⁴⁸ Weckerin's work enjoyed considerable popularity and was reprinted many times until the late seventeenth century.⁴⁹ Sabina Welser's cookbook, which she wrote in 1553, was, however, never printed. I will discuss her in greater detail below, but before we proceed we need to consider some of the difficulties of studying a cookbook from a philological point of view.

bestellen soll (Frankfurt a. M.: Sigmundt Feyerabendt, 1581), see the reprint ed. by Manfred Lemmer (Leipzig: Edition Leipzig, 1976); see also Regina Wunderer, *Weinbau und Weinbereitung im Mittelalter. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der mittelhochdeutschen Pelz- und Weinbücher*. Wiener Arbeiten zur germanischen Altertumskunde und Philologie, 37 (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2001). The 1676 edition bears the slightly changed title: *Ein neu Koch- Wein- Bier- und Essig Buch: Worinn: Eine gründliche Beschreibung . . .* (Frankfurt a. M.: Simon Beckenstein, Christian Gerlach, 1676).

⁴⁵ Peter Assion, *Alteutsche Fachliteratur*. Grundlagen der Germanistik, 13 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1973), 120–21.

⁴⁶ Trude Ehlert, *Das Kochbuch des Mittelalters*, 21–22.

⁴⁷ The only remarkable exception has been until now Angelika Ruge-Schatz, "Von der Rezeptsammlung zum Kochbuch—einige sozialhistorische Überlegungen über Autoren und Benutzer," *Essen und Trinken in Mittelalter und Neuzeit. Vorträge eines interdisziplinären Symposiums vom 10.–13. Juni 1987 an der Justus-August-Liebig-Universität Gießen*, ed. Irmgard Bitsch, Trude Ehlert, and Xenja von Ertzdorff (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1987), 217–26; here 223. Her comments, however, are limited to a few biographical facts and brief comments on Anna Weckerin's dedicatory prologue.

⁴⁸ Christa Baufeld, "Mittelalterliche Speisekultur. Eine Darstellung anhand von Denkmälern der Artesliteratur," *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft* 7 (1992/1993): 43–59, knows neither Anna Weckerin's nor Sabina Welser's contribution to the genre of cookbooks.

⁴⁹ See the modern reprint, ed. Julius Arndt and Erna Horn (Munich: Heimeran, 1977). The last edition appeared in 1697. This reprint is based on the 1598 edition.

IV. Philippine Welser

Insofar as most scholars interested in this genre have focused primarily on the content of the cookbooks, that is, the recipes, and on their sources, the creative aspect itself, which connects this corpus with late-medieval literature in general, has not received enough attention. Doris Aichholzer, following Peter Assion's arguments, specifically characterizes cookbooks as "gesellschaftliche Literatur" (socially-oriented literature) and deliberately discounts the author's personal contribution because the collection of recipes represents nothing, as she sees it, but a compilation from older texts.⁵⁰ Undoubtedly, however, cookbooks belong to the tradition of learned literature, whether they borrow their material from various sources or copy from each other, which often means that a number of recipes are identical with those in other cookbooks.⁵¹ As Aichholzer also points out, the textual problems with many cookbooks are considerable, especially because they often lack a systematic arrangement of the recipes, and many times the recipes omit particular technical details necessary for the preparation of dishes. Moreover, the written recipes occasionally only explain in general terms how to work on a food item, since the actual process or mechanical aspects are supposed to be known anyway and were not written down.⁵²

Between 1475 and 1620, ca. 220 cookbooks were printed in Germany, one third in German, and one fifth in Italian, but only two women can be detected among the many authors, Sabina Welser and Anna Weckerin. We know of a third woman associated with a cookbook, Philippine Welser, though she gained notoriety primarily for her public role in the house of Hapsburg, and she was not the author of her cookbook, which her parents obviously gave her as a gift long before her marriage. An anonymous (male?) author had put it together for her, but she later added some of her own recipes that were supposed to be remedies against certain sicknesses.⁵³

Philippine Welser (1527–1580) was the daughter of the Augsburg patrician Franz Welser and his wife Anna Adler who enjoyed the rank of knighthood to which the family had been elevated by Emperor Charles V in 1532. Archduke Ferdinand of

⁵⁰ Doris Aichholzer, "Wildu machen ayn guet essen . . ." *Drei mittelhochdeutsche Kochbücher: Erstedition, Übersetzung, Kommentar*. Wiener Arbeiten zur germanischen Altertumskunde und Philologie, 35 (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 1999), 23.

⁵¹ Trude Ehlert, "Wissensvermittlung in deutschsprachiger Fachliteratur des Mittelalters oder: Wie kam die Diätetik in die Kochbücher," *Würzburger medizinhistorische Mitteilungen* 8 (1990): 137–59.

⁵² Aichholzer, "Wildu machen ayn guet essen . . .", 29–31.

⁵³ For a selection of recipes taken from various cookbooks from the fourteenth through the nineteenth century, see *Aus Kochbüchern des 14. bis 19. Jahrhunderts. Quellen zur Geschichte einer Textart*. In collaboration with Renate Ertl and Angelika Schmitt, ed. Hugo Stopp. *Quellen zur deutschen Sprach- und Literaturgeschichte*, 1 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980).

Austria (1529–1595) fell in love with her sometime between 1547 and 1548 during the Imperial Diet in Augsburg, and eventually they married secretly in 1557. Ferdinand's father, Emperor Ferdinand I (1556–1564), was at first bitterly opposed to their union because of the difference in their social class. Eventually, he accepted his daughter-in-law, but her children were denied the Hapsburgian inheritance rights. In 1564, after Emperor Ferdinand I's death, the couple moved to Innsbruck where Ferdinand the Younger assumed the governance of Tyrol and settled in Castle Ambras, while Ferdinand's brother, Maximilian II (1564–1576), ascended to the imperial throne. In 1576 the Pope officially recognized the marriage, and from that time on Philippine enjoyed vast popularity both because of her social welfare programs for the poor and for her lavish court festivals with extravagant and new recipes. Her cookbook, however, does not reflect the new lifestyle and the new luxurious food preparation and meals at Castle Ambras, instead it can be traced back to its origins in Augsburg, where most of the recipes would have been in fairly common use.⁵⁴

V. Sabine Welser

Sabina Welser, on the other hand, can be credited with having written her own cookbook.⁵⁵ Klaus Dürrschmid identifies two women with this name, first, the daughter of Ulrich Welser, born in 1532, who married the Augsburg citizen Conrad Voehlin on June 15, 1550, who was elected mayor in 1562, gave up his position soon after in 1563 and moved to Hungerhausen to assume his inheritance.

⁵⁴ Klaus Dürrschmid, *Eine Geschichte des deutschsprachigen Kochbuchs* (Vienna: 2002; published on the internet at: <http://homepage.boku.ac.at/duerr> (last accessed on Feb. 23, 2007; see section 3), 7–8. The circumstances under which this book was written remain uncertain, but the details are quite reliable; see also Krones, "Ferdinand II.," *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*. Vol. 6. Rpt. of the 1877 edition (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1968), 697–700 (no mention of the cookbook); for the male members of the Welser family, see F. Roth, "Welser," *ibid.*, Vol. 41 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1971), 682–92; Paul Lindenberg, "Philippine Welser," *id.*, *Das Denkmal der deutschen Frauen* (Essen: Schumann, 1927), 46–56; Eduard Widmoser, "Philippine Welser (1527–1580)," *Lebensbilder aus dem Bayerischen Schwaben*, ed. Freiherr Götz von Pölnitz. Vol. 2 (Munich: Hueber, 1953), 227–45; *Das Kochbuch der Philippine Welser*, 2 vols. Vol. 1. *Faksimileband*, ed. Manfred Lemmer. Vol. 2. Kommentar, Transkription und Glossar von Gerold Hayer (Innsbruck: Pinguin-Verlag, 1983); Sigrid-Maria Größing, *Kaufmannstochter im Kaiserhaus: Philippine Welser und ihre Heilkunst* ([Vienna]: Kremayr & Scheriau, 1992); see also Maike Vogt-Lüerssen, "Philippine Welser (1527–1580: der erfolgreiche Aufstieg einer Bürgerlichen," *40 Frauenschicksale aus dem 15. und 16. Jahrhundert* (Mainz-Kostheim, 2001), 227–30.

⁵⁵ *Das Kochbuch der Sabina Welserin*, ed. Hugo Stopp. Mit einer Übersetzung von Ulrike Gießmann. Germanische Bibliothek. Neue Folge, 4. Reihe (Heidelberg: Winter, 1980). The manuscript is today housed in the Augsburger Staats- und Stadtbibliothek, Papier, 4^o Cod. 137. The manuscript was originally in the possession of the Jesuit library in Augsburg.

His wife died in 1599. The second Sabina Welser was the daughter of Anton Welser and Felicitas Baumgartner. She was born in 1515, married the Nuremberg citizen Leonhard Hirsvogel in 1535, divorced him in 1539, and died in 1576.⁵⁶ Which ever of these two women Sabina Welser might have been, she offers a remarkable cookbook and briefly introduces herself at the beginning with the following words:

Jn dem namen der hailigen
trifaltigkaitt fach ich, sabina
welserin, das kochbüch an.
gott welle mir sein gottliche
gnad/ vnnd weiß-
hait vnnd verstand vnnd ver-
nufft verleichen, das ich nach
seinem gottlichen willen leb
hie jn disser zeit vnnd bey
jm ewig amen. 1553 jar.

[In the name of the Holy Trinity do I, Sabina Welserin, begin this cookbook. May God lend me His divine grace, wisdom, reason and understanding so that I may live according to His divine will, now in this time and forever, Amen. In the year 1553.]⁵⁷

The author limits herself to this brief prologue, and then lists nothing but specific recipes without any further comments about herself or her intentions in writing this text. Following the brief invocation, however, Sabina Welser first provides an alphabetical listing of all recipes, without offering any other specific thematic guidelines for her readers. Her cookbook abruptly comes to an end with recipe no. 205 without any comments concerning her personal intentions and motivation. But she seems to have preferred sweet pies, cakes, and other baked goods, as documented by fifty-six out of two hundred and five recipes for the preparation of these desserts.

Despite the brevity of her introductory statement, the author reflects a strong sense of self-confidence as she prays to God to provide her with reason, wisdom, and intelligence. Moreover, she introduces herself by name: “ich, sabina welserin,” and expresses her wish to live according to the religious norms of her time: “das ich nach seinem gottlichen willen leb.” Unfortunately, nothing else is known about Sabina Welser, and it is especially frustrating that we cannot even identify her

⁵⁶ Dürschmid, *Eine Geschichte*, 10; Hugo Stopp, *Das Kochbuch der Sabina Welserin*, 10–11, offers additional details.

⁵⁷ Here quoted from Hugo Stopp's edition, 1980; though I could not reproduce the long-shafted 's.' See also the Internet edition: <http://homepage.univie.ac.at/thomas.gloning/tx/sawe.htm> (last accessed on Feb. 23, 2007).

more specifically within the context of her extensive and highly reputable family.⁵⁸ All her recipes, however, demonstrate that she had an excellent command of the discourse of recipes. Her instructions are well formulated, systematic, and easy to follow, such as: “15. Item nim ain ganß, fill sy mit zwiffel, geschinten kittine, biren vnnd speck, stecks dan an ain spiß vnnd brats” (Take a goose, fill it with onions, peeled quinces, pears and bacon, then put it on a spit and roast it). Another example would be recipe no. 40, how to prepare a meal with peas: “Seud erbis, das sy miessig werden, thus jn ain durchschlag / treibs durch wie ain mandelmilch, saffern, jmber, rorlach treib damit durch, so sights gleich wie ain wurm, vnnd see zucker darauff vnnd gibs kalt fur” (Boil peas until they turn into mash, place them in a cloth and sieve them like almond milk. Add saffron, ginger, and cinnamon. This will look like a worm. Spread a little sugar and serve it cold). The author also offers alternatives in case a certain ingredient is missing, such as for the preparation of a pear cake (no. 73): “hast du kain marckt, so nim buter oder sonst ain schmaltz” (if you do not have marrow, then take butter or another fat). Typical of many cookbook authors, Sabina Welser often addresses her audience with the following sentence: “Wiltu kesßkiechlen bachen” (no. 96; If you want to bake cheese pies). She never tells us how much time any of her dishes will need to be cooked and simply assumes that her readers would know themselves, such as in no. 133 (recipe for a cake with spices): “mach ain boden mit ainem ay vnd bachs langsam” (make a pie with one egg and bake it slowly). Occasionally she warns the cook not to add too much salt: “versaltz es nit” (no. 152), or to avoid too much liquid when cooking a fish (no. 172), but often she concludes her recipes with the reassuring sentence: “so ist es gut” (no. 156; then it will be good), or: “richts also an, ist ain gut essen” (no. 196; prepare it in this way, and it will be a good dish). Compared with any of the major late-medieval cookbooks, whether the *Rheinfränkisches Kochbuch* from ca. 1445 or Meister Hannsen’s cookbook from ca. 1460, Sabina Welser’s cookbook proves to be a worthy representative of this genre, concise in its formulations, easy to follow, pragmatic in its instruction, and arranged systematically.

⁵⁸ Johann Heinrich Zedler, *Grosses vollstaendiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Kuenste*. Vol. 25 (Leipzig and Halle: Zedler, 1747), 1616 and 1617, identifies the family relationships as follows: Sabine Welser was the daughter of Leonhard Welser and his wife Sibylle Hemmerlin. She was married three times, first to Elias Weiß, then to Johann Mattes Stammer, and finally to Christoph Jenitsch. Her great-grandfather was Lucas Welser, city councilman of Augsburg, and her grandfather was Bartholomaeus Welser, Secret Councilor for Emperor Charles V. Bartolomaeus Welser’s brother Anton Welser, who was married to Felicitas Paumgaertner, had, among his seven children, a daughter also named Sabine. She was married to Leonhard Hirßvogel (here I am using Zedler’s spelling). Zedler does not mention any literary or culturally significant work produced by any of the Welser family members.

VI. Anna Weckerin

Although feminist-oriented research has produced a lot of solid work on medieval and early-modern women, Anna Weckerin does not appear in any of the standard reference works or monographs.⁵⁹ The meager skeleton of her biography reads as follows: She was married to Johann Jacob Wecker (born in 1528 in Basel), who had begun his medical studies at the University of Basel in 1544. In 1557 Wecker was appointed Professor of Dialectic at the same university, but he also continued with his work as medical doctor. In 1566 he moved to Colmar where he assumed the post of city doctor. As Anna Weckerin's cookbook, published posthumously, indicates, both she and her husband closely cooperated in creating special recipes for the sick, aiming for a more holistic cure, as we would call it today, rather than relying on pretty dubious medicines sold in the apothecary. Johann Jacob Wecker died in 1586. His wife Anna subsequently published a new edition of his *Antidotarium Speciale, ex opt. authorum tam veterum quam recentiorum scriptis fideliter congestum, methodice digestum, & amplius triente actum*, which was published in Basel by Eusebius Episcopius, et Nicolai Fratres haeredes (heirs) in 1588 (first published in 1574).⁶⁰ We find her name on the dedicatory page, but otherwise she did not comment on her husband's work.⁶¹ Shortly thereafter, Anna married the Altendorf city clerk Israel Aeschenberger. Anna Weckerin's daughter Katharina had previously married the highly respected scholar and philosopher Nicolaus Taurellus in 1572 and settled in Basel with him.⁶² After Anna lost her second husband, she moved in with her daughter's family. In 1596 she completed her cookbook and dedicated it to the Countess of the Palatinate, Luise-Juliane, and Katharina published it on her mother's behalf shortly after her death in 1597.

Amazingly, both Johann Jacob Weckerin and his wife found their way into the incredibly expansive *Universal-Lexicon* published by Johann Heinrich Zedler between 1732 and 1750 in sixty-four volumes.⁶³ Apparently, medicinal science, especially if based on practical experience, enjoyed a high reputation in the eighteenth century. Zedler would not have included individual articles both on the husband and his wife if their medicinal recipe book had not gained great respect

⁵⁹ Because of her biographical dates, her name was not included in Jean M. Wood / Maria Fürstenwald, *Schriftstellerinnen, Künstlerinnen und gelehrte Frauen des deutschen Barock* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984).

⁶⁰ Wecker's *Antidotarium* appeared first in 1574, was reprinted in 1577, 1581, 1588, and 1595 (see VD 16). I could not verify whether his wife edited only the 1588 edition or also the 1595 edition.

⁶¹ Here I have consulted the copy housed in the British Library, C.79.f.7.

⁶² Taurellus published a short dedicatory poem to Weckerin, "Ad Lectorem," following Weckerin's own "Praefatio," in the 1588 edition.

⁶³ Surprisingly, we find a short but instructive entry on Anna Weckerin in Johann Heinrich Zedler's *Grosses Vollständiges Universal-Lexikon* (Leipzig and Halle: 1747), Vol. 53, 1772.

far into the eighteenth century. Significantly, there is no indication that Zedler regarded Anna's contribution as exceptional for a woman, especially as he treated her as equally important as her husband.⁶⁴ After a brief biography of her husband and a list of his five publications (between 1563 and 1581), we are separately informed about Anna Weckerin (her father's name was Isaac Keller). According to Zedler, she arranged her cookbook in the French fashion ("Frantzösische Manier"), which probably added to its long-term popularity. The 1667 edition ran to eight printings, the one from 1679 also to eight, and the last edition (Hamburg) reached as many as twelve printings.⁶⁵

As Angelika Ruge-Schatz informs us, Anna obviously cooperated closely with her first husband and found a strong supporter in him. In fact, Wecker often encouraged her to write down her own observations if they proved to be useful for the future treatment of an illnesses.⁶⁶ A close analysis of her own prologue and personal comments throughout her cookbook will allow us to gain a much better understanding of the writer and the position which she held as the city doctor's wife.

VII. Anna Weckerin's Wedding Song

Before we turn to her cookbook, let us consider a remarkable wedding song by Weckerin, her *Hochzeit Spruch*, published in 1586,⁶⁷ so as to gain a general idea

⁶⁴ Whereas normally one would have expected her husband to receive the major entry, with a brief reference to his wife, Zedler treats her clearly as an individual, not simply defined by her marriage to Weckerin.

⁶⁵ Remarkably, Zedler adds two abbreviated references to the sources which provide him with information about Anna Weckerin: Julius von Rohr, *Compendieuse Haushaltungs-Bibliothek darinnen nicht allein die neuesten und besten Autores die so wohl von der Haushaltung überhaupt als vom Ackerbau, Viehzucht, Jägerey . . . Bergwercken, u.s.w. geschrieben, recensiret und beurtheilet: sondern auch überall des Autoris eigene Meditationes: nebst andern curieuses Observationen aus den Antiquitaeten, der Physic und Mathematic eingemischet werden* (Leipzig: Martini, 1726), and Joannes Franciscus Buddeus and Ferdinand Ludwig von Bresler, *Allgemein-Historisches Lexicon*, 2nd ed. (1722; Leipzig: Thomas Fritsch, 1722) [I have added the full bibliographical information]. In other words, eighteenth-century scholarship clearly held both Weckerin and his wife in high esteem for their work and described them, in von Rohr's terms, as "die neuesten und besten Autores" (the newest and best authors). Moreover, Zedler mentions many more editions of Weckerin's cookbook than have survived today. The full history of Anna Weckerin's cookbook in modern times still needs to be written.

⁶⁶ Angelika Ruge-Schatz, "Von der Rezeptsammlung zum Kochbuch," 1987, 223 (with reference to Anna Weckerin's statements in her own work, pp. 24 and 83).

⁶⁷ *Ein Hochzeit Spruch / zu Ehren vnd gluecklicher Wolfart. Dem Erbarv vnd Vesten Junckern / Jacob Poemern / vnd seiner Erbarv vnd Tugentsamen Braut / Jungfrawen Barbara Loeffelholtzin: Gestellet Durch / Anna Kellerin: Doctor Hannß Jacob Wecker seligen hinderlassene Wittfraw* (Nuremberg: Nicolaus Knorr,

about her literary and poetic abilities. Particularly noteworthy about this poem proves to be that she seems to have been the only German sixteenth-century woman poet responsible for the composition and (!) publication of such a wedding poem. In the vast majority of all comparable cases the poets can be identified as ministers and learned men; nevertheless, Weckerin was obviously treated with high respect by her contemporaries, otherwise her song would not have been printed.⁶⁸

Like many contemporary authors who were interested in the topic of love and marriage, Anna Weckerin begins with an interpretation of *Genesis* and focuses on the creation of Eve out of Adam's rib. In contrast to most other writers, however, she has God say about Eve: "das ist bein von meim bein" (v. 2; this is flesh from my flesh), which implies that both Adam and Eve are considered God's helpers without any differentiation in their gender. Although Eve—woman in general—functions as man's servant, Weckerin emphasizes that both husband and wife are two souls in one body. Marriage has the prime function of creating children, but this goal is only possible, according to the poet, if the husband treats his wife with respect and regards her like his own soul. The woman, however, clearly emerges as the weaker partner in marriage, which implies for Weckerin that the husband has to take care of his wife, protect her and support her in every respect. Specifically, the poet admonishes the groom not to "bochen / boldern mit jhr treib" (do not bother and irk her, 3, 5), as she is a rib of his own body. From a religious perspective, Weckerin even reminds the future husband that his wife represents a gift from God that he must respect with all his might (3, 9).⁶⁹ The poet specifically appeals to the husband to disregard minor mistakes or shortcomings of his wife, as marriage is not a simple arrangement and requires from both

[1586]), here quoted from the copy in the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, 177 Quod. (24).

⁶⁸ Hans-Georg Kemper, *Deutsche Lyrik der frühen Neuzeit*. Vol. 2: *Konfessionalismus* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987), 174–75, also knows of no other sixteenth-century female poet treating the subject of marriage. This is not to say that there is no women's poetry from that time, but all the songs I have found deal with love, love pain, pregnancy, and frustration in love. *Deutsche Frauenlieder des fünfzehnten und sechzehnten Jahrhunderts. Authentische Stimmen in der deutschen Frauenliteratur der Frühneuzeit oder Vertreter einer poetischen Gattung (das "Frauenlied")?* Einleitung, Edition und Kommentar von Albrecht Classen. *Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur*, 136 (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 1999).

⁶⁹ Hans-Georg Kemper, *Deutsche Lyrik der frühen Neuzeit*. Vol. 2, 174–75, entirely misinterprets this song because he focuses exclusively on the second stanza where the poet addresses the bride and admonishes her not to oppose her husband, not to be rude to him, and to display for him all her feminine virtues: "Das dich vor deim Mann solt duecken" (submit under your husband, 2, 8). Kemper's interpretation proves to be rather superficial, since he seems daunted by the sheer number of poems produced in the sixteenth century and simply chooses and picks individual verses and stanzas to confirm his global theses; these, however, are basically informed by highly traditional views about the sixteenth century, whereas a careful reading of his primary material would have forced him to offer different readings.

partners to do their part to make their cohabitation work harmoniously. In the fourth stanza we hear that the husband is supposed to protect his wife's and children's honor and well-being (4). At the same time, she admonishes the wife not to act like a tyrant and to stay away from cursing: "Nicht wie ein Heyd schwehren vnd fluchn / || Gottes wort allzeit fleissig suchn" (do not curse and swear like a heathen, instead look for God's words all the time; 4). In conformity with the traditional, patriarchal concept of marriage, the wife is supposed to be in charge of the children and to handle the household properly. Moreover, the husband must make sure that he has put enough money aside for his wife in case he will die before her (4). Problems in marriage are common, as Anna Weckerin confirms, but she recommends that the wife tread carefully when criticizing her husband's failings and shortcomings, as he is, after all, the lord and has to be obeyed (4).⁷⁰ Surprisingly, Weckerin repeatedly reminds the bride to abstain from physical violence against her husband: "Gegn jhm sol sie nicht brauchen gwalt" (5), but the same applies to the husband, which suggests that for the poet marriage represents, despite the patriarchal framework, a form of partnership. While she insists on women's placidity, she also confirms that women have the power and should exert the relevant influence to prevent their husbands from committing foolishness, from shedding blood, and from forgetting God (5). Wives should, above all, impress their husbands with their wisdom and religiosity (5), which would turn them into role models of their society. If the marriage partners submit entirely to God, they would be guaranteed entry to Paradise: "Zu Christo in das Paradeys" (to Christ in Paradise; 6). From a practical point of view, however, Weckerin strongly urges both husband and wife to love and respect each other, and to follow the model provided by Abraham and Sara in the Old Testament (4). Undoubtedly, the poet advocated a traditional concept of marriage, but she was realistic enough to see the danger of violence which either husband or wife could resort to. Her hope for a happy and harmonious union rests in God and in the partners' mutual respect, which would be contingent on the observance of basic virtues such as humility, peacefulness, cooperation, and love.

VIII. Cooking and Healing Through a Narrative Lens

Anna Weckerin's cookbook underwent many changes large and small over the decades. The 1620 edition, for instance, offers a revised and expanded title: *New koestlich vnd nutzliches Kochbuch. In welchem kurtz= || lichen begriffen / Wie allerhand || kuenstlichen Speisen / so wohl von zahmen || als wilden Thieren: Voegel vnd*

⁷⁰ Manuel Braune, *Ehe, Liebe, Freundschaft. Semantik der Vergesellschaftung im frühneuhochdeutschen Prosaroman*. Frühe Neuzeit, 60 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), 148–52.

Federwildpret / // gruenen vnnd gedoerten Fischwerck / Wie auch allerley // gebachens / als Darren / Marcelpanen Pa= // steten vnd dergleichen. // Beneben von viel vnnd mancherley Obs / // von Gemueß / fuer gesunde vnnd krancke / in allerley // Beschwerden vnd Gepresten / auch fuer schwangere Wei= // ber / Kindbetterinnen / vnd albtetage schwache Personen / // kunst: vnd nutzlichen in der eyl / vnnd mit geringem // kosten zubereiten vnnd zuzurichten weiland beschrieben: // Durch Frau Anna Weckerin. // Jetzo aber mit sehr vielen / newen zur ge= // sundheit / Gastung vnnd Pancketen dienen // den Trachten / viel vermehrt vnd ge= // bessert (Basel: Ludwig Koenig, 1620).⁷¹ Anna Weckerin's prologue from 1596, however, was reprinted unchanged. This is the crucial text that will allow us to gain a better understanding of the author's self-perception, her approach to writing as such, her concept of the cookbook in general, and her role as a culinary and medical researcher, who boldly joined the public discourse both on "alternative" medicine and the teachings of dietetics based on her practical experiences.

After having dedicated her cookbook to the Countess of the Palatinate Louise Juliana, Weckerin emphasizes that her deceased husband commanded vast knowledge of the medical sciences and had demonstrated his profound learning through the publication of several scholarly books. Weckerin had been fully aware of the great significance of a well-balanced diet both for healthy and sick people, especially as such a diet often proved to be more effective than medicine. Consequently, cooking emerged as an important science for him as he had preferred to heal his patients with the help of good food than with medicine: "vnd so viel jmmer moeglich gewesen / jederzeit liebe auß der Kuchen / dann auß der Apotecken curiert vnnd geholfen" (IIv). Once Johann Jacob Wecker had noticed that his wife possessed particular skills in the kitchen with which she was remarkably successful in helping people to recover from sickness ("mir auch der liebe Gott ein sonderbare gnad vn gaba krancken Leuthen / sonderlich mit zurichtung allerhand nutzlicher vnd annemblicher Speisen / zu dienen vnd zuwarten / verliehen vnd durch solches mittel / neben ihm durch Gottes gnad viel schwacher Leuth, / auch wol sehr hohes stands / widerumb aufgebracht" [IIv]).⁷²

⁷¹ Here as well I have transcribed the superscripta as regular diphthongs. The title translates as: A new delightful and useful cookbook which contains recipes for meals both of domestic and wild animals, of farm birds and wild birds, fresh and dried fish, baked goods, such as cakes, sweet almond cakes and similar things. Also about many kinds of fruit and vegetables, for healthy and sick people suffering from various kinds of illnesses and suffering, also for pregnant women and those who have recently given birth, for old and weak people. Instructions on how to prepare and serve them artistically and practically at little cost, erstwhile written by Mrs. Anna Weckerin. Now considerably expanded and improved with many new recipes for good health, dinners for guests, and banquets. Here I have used a copy housed in the British Library, 1037.c.9.

⁷² Dear God gave me a special talent to help sick people by way of preparing all kinds of useful and pleasing meals. This made it possible for me, next to my husband and through God's grace, to recover the health of many sick people, both high ranking and ordinary.

Consequently he asked her regularly to accompany him on his visits to the sick and even went so far as to encourage her to write down her personal experiences to preserve them for posterity: "sondern auch zum offtern vermanet / dasjenige / was ich also bey den Krancken observiert / gebraucht / vnd nutzlich befunden / zu beschreiben vnd auffzuzeichnen (IIv; often he encouraged me to write down what I had observed and used with the patients and what I had found to be helpful). Weckerin did not face any difficulty in making her voice heard in the treatment of sick people; on the contrary, her husband quickly realized her particular abilities and encouraged her to write them down. At first she had hesitated to follow his advice because she had never written down anything before, and had instead closely collaborated with her husband in the practical analysis of each individual case of sickness. After some time, however, once her husband had encouraged her repeatedly, and once she had realized how much she actually cared for sick people, she accepted the invitation, "deßjenigen / als vil ich mich zuruck erinnern koennen / auffs Papyr zubringen" (IIv; to write down on paper as much as I could remember). She only agreed to this literary-scientific project because her husband had promised to read and correct her text: "solches werck seim verstand nach vbersehen / corrigiern vnd verbessern solte" (IIv). Before he could finish his work, however, Johann Jacob Wecker died, and his widow immediately interrupted her project, probably because she felt distressed and insecure, especially as she did not have any formal training and must have worried about severe criticism at the hands of the medical and culinary profession. Interestingly, at that moment many people came forward and encouraged her to continue with her cookbook: "vil ansehmliche Mans vnd Weibspersonen denen solch mein vorhaben wißlich gewesen dasselbig zu vollstrecken / dermassen mit bitten bey mir angehalten / das ihnen solches zu weigern mir nit moeglich gewesen noch geziemen woellen" (IIIr; many highly respected men and women who had known of my project begged me so intensively to complete it that it was not possible for me to refuse them, especially as it seemed inappropriate). Moreover, she realized that she should complete the task for her children, for whom her recipes would be a valuable treasure ("fuer ein sondern Schatz auffzuheben," IIIr). Furthermore, many famous medical doctors, especially those in Nuremberg, appealed to her to preserve her knowledge for the future and not to take it with her to the grave: "daß sie mich vilfaeltig ermanet / dieselbe nit also bey mir ersitzen vnd neben mir begraben werden zu lassen" (IIIr).

Weckerin had obviously acquired quite a reputation for her culinary skills in the area of the practical treatment of the sick, although here she only refers to the medical doctors because she seeks to justify her decision actually to write down her recipes and to have them published: "vnnd wie es dieselben befunden vnd geurtheilt / meniglich zu nutz vnd besten / in oeffentlichen Truck zugeben" (IIIr). As her own death approached and she was aware of how short her remaining time

was at her great age, Weckerin had submitted her work to relevant authorities (“verständige vnnd erfahrne Leuth nachmaln vbersehen lassen”, IIIr) and was then bold enough to send the cookbook off to the printer. Constantly afraid of being accused of inordinate pride and arrogance because she had dared as a woman to contribute to the public medical discourse by means of her cookbook (“vorwitz oder vnbesonnenheit”, IIIv), Weckerin once more insists on the role played by the authorities in the field of medical sciences, who had approved the text and encouraged her to publish it: “mit gutem Rahte vor bedacht / auch Approbation vnnd gutheissen / nit allein mein / sondern der sachen verstaendiger Leut” (IIIv).

Not surprisingly, she also refers to God, who wanted her to make her culinary-medical knowledge available to people in need. Nevertheless, the more Weckerin insists that she had secured the advice and approval of the medical experts (“sonderlich der Artzney verstaendigen zu vrtheilen / vnnd wo von noethen zuverbesseren” (IIIv), the more we also perceive how much she was confident of the effectiveness of her recipes and her practical experience. Not surprisingly, she goes so far as to evoke God’s approval of her activity which, as she claims, would be of the greatest use to everyone: “Gott dem Allmaechtigen / wie derselbe mein Hertz weißt / zuvorderst zu lob / vnnd dem Nechsten zu nutz geschehen” (IIIv; it was written, as I know in my heart, in praise of God the Almighty and for the good use of the ordinary people).

IX. The Cookbook as a Narrative Work of Art: Strategies, Style, and Structure

Cooking has always been of great relevance both to the daily life and for medical conditions, as both the writings of pagan authors and the Bible confirm. Weckerin mentions the former only in passing without going into details, but refers her readers to specific Biblical passages that deal with cooking and other types of food preparation (IIIr [sic]). In a brief comment the author indicates that she had helped not only her deceased husband to prepare medically appropriate meals, but had also provided assistance to many other medical doctors and apothecaries: “allweg verstaendige Artzte neben der Apotecken auß der Kuchen vielfaltig curiert vnd geholffen haben” (IIIr). Moreover, Weckerin refers her readers to other medical authors who happily resorted to herbs, salads, soups, and other food to fight their patients’ sicknesses, such as “Matthiolus, Camerarius, Tabernaemontanus, Wirsung vnd andere / in jhren vnlangst außgangen Arney (sic) vnnd Kraeterbuechern (sic) / auff solchen schlag allerhand Salsen / Salat / Suepplein / . . . fuer allerley Kranckheiten vnnd Gebresten / zubeschreiben / als eines stuecks ihrer Kunst und Profession / sich nit geschemet” (IIIv; Matthiolus, Camerarius, Tabernaemontanus, Wirsung, and others have not been ashamed to

describe in their recently published medicine and herbal books all kinds of sauces, salads, soups . . . for all kinds of illnesses and suffering as part of their art and profession). In other words, Weckerin here positions herself in a public discourse in which the use of culinary medicine had already been accepted as a scientific method, thereby claiming the same public recognition as was enjoyed by her male contemporaries working in the same field of medicinal sciences: “es soll nit allerdings vntauglich / sonder viel mehr in vil weg / inmassen es wie obangeregt von verstaendigen allzeit geurtheilt / nutzlich befunden werden” (IIIv; it will always be found to be useful in many different ways, especially as the experts will, as indicated above, find it useful).

Once Weckerin has satisfied the need to evoke the most influential authorities and to build the best defense against any possible attack challenging her text as a speculative and unscientific cookbook, she turns to practical matters and outlines the structure of her book: “Damit aber jetz angedeute nutzbarkeit solches meines Kochbuchs desto besser verstanden / vnd ins werck gezogen moege werden / hab ich dasselbige in nachfolgende vier vnderschiedliche Buecher abgetheilt” (IIIv; I have divided my cookbook in the following four parts so that its usefulness, as indicated, will be better understood and put into practice). Speaking both as a person interested in the medicinal application of foodstuffs and as the author of a cookbook, Weckerin also discusses quite openly that some recipes have very little effect on sick people, even though she has included them as well, such as fish dishes: “von Fischen / jedoch vnd weil dieselben den Krancken wenig vnd selten nutz sind / ist dasselbe desto kuertzer beschrieben” (Vr; of fish; but because these rarely help sick people and are of little use, this subject is described more briefly). She indicates, in other words, that her recipes would have a respectable place within any high-quality kitchen, whether they have a medicinal effect or not. Moreover, Weckerin emphasizes that most of her recipes are the result of practical experience (“erfahrung”, Vr), which certainly matters most in the world of foodstuff preparation.

Weckerin does not claim to offer the perfect recipe for every sick person, instead she calls for reasonable flexibility depending on the circumstances and the patient’s individual history:

Es soll aber durch diß mein Buch niemand so gar schnurschlecht verbunden seyn / die vorgeschriebene stuck anderst nicht / dann eben auff denselben schlag vnd in der verzeichneten Anzahl / Quantitet vnd Dost zuzurichten vnnd zugebrauchen / sonder verstaendige werden sich dißfahls / nach rath erfahrner Artzten vnd fuer sich selbst / nach der Natur / Complexion / Alter / Zeit / Ort / Gewohnheit / ja dem vergangenen gefuehrten Leben der krancken vnd anderen vmbstaender vernuenfftig zu regulieren / vnd je nach gestallt eins oder anders in groesser oder geringer Anzahl vnd schwere zunehmen wissen. (Vr)

[Nobody ought to be constrained through my book to prepare and to apply exactly the prescribed recipes according to the outlined quantity and amount. On the contrary, reasonable people will consider, in light of the advice of experienced doctors and on the basis of their own knowledge, the nature, physical composition, age, time, place, habits, even the previous life of the patients, and other circumstances, and will know how to adapt the recipes in a reasonable manner and according to the [patient's] needs.]

Undoubtedly, here speaks the experienced practitioner of culinary medicine who understands the limits of her own knowledge and is fully aware to what extent all recipes, including those based on specific food, have to be handled prudently ("vernuenfftig").

Subsequently, Weckerin once again addresses the Countess of the Palatinate, whom she does not know personally, but from whom she expects to receive the desired public support for her cookbook (Vv). The author resorts to more or less classical humility formulas: "dieselbe nicht vngnaedigst / als von mir auß Freffel / Hochmut oder anders vnbeuegten wegen" (Vv; may she not think of me unkindly, believing that I were guilty of an outrage, arrogance, or other transgressions), but she certainly also indicates how much she is, in fact, proud of her cookbook which had met with so much public approval from the medical experts. Consequently, Weckerin hopes that she can instill in her potential patroness a love for this kind of culinary medicine, especially as she has met many high ranking noble people in her life whom she had helped to cure with her special recipes: "in ihren Kranckheiten mit meiner Hand vnd kochwerck / hievor vilfaeltig nuetzlich / vnnd zu sonderm danck gedient / erfahren vnd gebraucht / vnd demnach zu zurichten / nit in eins jeden vermoegen" (Vv; I have been helpful to them many times when they were sick, using my hand and culinary knowledge, and received their thanks, but I could not be available for all of them). Addressing the Countess of the Palatinate, Weckerin hopes that she will not only welcome her cookbook, but will assist her in making it available also for those who would not be able to afford it: "auch vnvermoegenden gnaedist mittheilen vnd zu nutz richten koendte" (Vv; share it gracefully with the impoverished and let them have it for their use).

The prologue concludes with some religious comments, a reference to her son-in-law, the professor of medicine at the University of Basel, Nicolaus Taurellus,⁷³ further humility formulas with which she tries to strengthen her appeal to the Countess to accept her work under her patronage, and with wishes for her good

⁷³ Nicolaus Taurellus, here called Nicolao Taurello, a translation of the German name "Oechslein" (little ox) into Latin, had married Weckerin's daughter Katharina in 1578; the latter was a child of Weckerin's second marriage to Israel Aeschenberger; see Karl Groos, "Taurellus," *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Vol. 37 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1894), 467–71.

health. But she does not forget to remind her addressee that she is an old widow and needs financial support in her old age: "mich alte gelebte Wittib / sampt den meinigen in allen gnaden weitter wolten befohlen seyn lassen" (VIr; provide me as an old widow and my family with your further protection and support). Overall, of course, these are fairly standard statements in a prologue dedicated to a high-ranking noblewoman, but they confirm, once again, that Anna Weckerin knew very well how to handle the expected rhetorical formulas and understood how to appeal to a patroness, reminding her of the significance of this cookbook and of the respect which she has already enjoyed from the most famous medical doctors. Not surprisingly, the title of the actual cookbook reads: "Nuetzliches / Schoenes / vnnd Kunstreiches Kochbuch" (a Ir; Useful, Wonderful, and Artful Cookbook).

Weckerin demonstrates with ease her extraordinary skill as a writer of recipes. Compared to the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century German cookbooks, almost exclusively written by men, her *Koestlich new KOchbuch* proves to be equally well written, clear in its specific instructions, and logically structured. Irrespective of the individual writing style in each of the many cookbooks considered so far, each of them, and so also the one by Sabina Welser and the one by Anna Weckerin, demonstrates that the narrative art of creating a cookbook was not foreign to early-modern German female authors. One short example must suffice, though the majority of her recipes prove to be highly detailed and impressively specific in their instructions:

Karpffen in einer andern guten gelben Bruee

SChupe den Karpffen / mache stuecke drauß / vnd seudt jhn in einem weissen Wein / vnnd wenn er recht am Sode ist / so reibe Brosam von Brod vnd thue eines Eyes groß dran / wuertze es mit Ingwer / Pfeffer / Saffran / Zucker / vnd Zimmet / laß vollend einsieden / vnnd richte jhn an / so ist es recht (129)

[Carp in another good yellow sauce

Remove the scale, cut the carp into pieces, and stew them in white wine. When they are cooking well, sprinkle breadcrumbs into the stew and add one egg yolk, spice it with ginger, pepper, saffron, sugar, and cinnamon, then bring to the boil, and stir well. This will produce good results.]

Certainly, Weckerin does not offer any specific information about quantities, length of boiling, and intensity of heat. But such aspects are normally ignored in medieval and early-modern cookbooks. More important, the instructions for this fish soup are clearly formulated and identify all the ingredients. Any cook with some experience would easily be in a good position to prepare this dish and yet could also add his or her own variations. Weckerin does not add any personal comments and limits herself to a precise outline of how to prepare all food items for cooking, frying, baking, or stewing, etc., then she identifies all relevant spices,

and describes the individual steps which the cook has to take to create a good meal. Many times, however, Weckerin concludes her recipes with the short comment: “so ist es recht” (this is correct) or “so wird es recht vnd gut” (in this way it will be correct and good). One of the longest recipes in the entire cookbook, “Ein Blatten oder Schuesselmuß” (236–81; A Dish for Plates or Bowls), demonstrates, however, that Weckerin’s ambition was not simply to list the basic ingredients and processes necessary for each dish. Here she combines many different recipes for a variety of foodstuffs which follow, however, guidelines similar for their preparation. The last one she concludes with the comment: “so ist es gut vnnd wolgeschmack” (281; so it will be good and tasty).

Surprisingly, although Weckerin had presented her cookbook as medicinal in its primary purpose, the actual recipes hardly ever address this issue. One of these instances proves to be a recipe for capon or chicken soup (4) which she concludes with the short comment: “vnd richte die Suppe darauff an / sie ist kraefftig vnd gesund” (if you prepare the soup accordingly, it is rich and healthy). The effectiveness of an egg soup is as follows: “Diese sollen die Krancken nuechteren essen / die verstopfft sind / vnd sich purgieren woellen / es bekompt jhnen gar wol” (7; Those who suffer from constipation and want to purge themselves should take it on an empty stomach; it does them much good). Weckerin also provides alternative food for sick people if they have a dislike of some particular kind of meat (17), and recommends a specific soup for those who suffer from physical weakness (21). Occasionally we also find a recipe where the author offers an alternative ingredient particularly for those who are sick: “aber fuer ein Krancks nimb an statt deß Spechs Rindermarck” (38; for a sick person use beef marrow instead of bacon). In the majority of cases, however, the medical purpose of the recipes seems to have been forgotten. On the other hand, as a short reference in the title for one recipe indicates, most recipes are intended for the cure of sick people, even if the author mentions this aspect very little: “Allerhand eingemachte Huener fuer die Krancken” (80; all kinds of chicken meals for sick people). Another example would be: “Auff ein andere weiß Fleisch vnd Huener fuer gesunde vnd krancke” (83; another method of preparing meat and chicken for healthy and sick people). As the recipe for stuffed sweatmeats indicates, Weckerin obviously aimed at a broad audience and conceived of her cookbook as appealing both to sick and to healthy people: “Allerhand gefüllte Daerm / darvon man auch den Krancken geben hat” (101; all kinds of stuffed sweatmeats which you can also serve to sick people).

When we consult earlier printed versions of Weckerin’s cookbook, a remarkable difference becomes noticeable. In the 1605 edition, printed by Ludwig König in Basel,⁷⁴ we discover not only a preface by Weckerin’s daughter Katharina (married

⁷⁴ I consulted the copy available in the British Library, 1037.c.8.

to Nicolaus Taurellus), but also a notably different arrangement of the recipes, quite apart from the fact that the 1620 edition contained a number of additional recipes, obviously not written by the original author. Moreover, Weckerin's original cookbook (both in its 1597 and 1605 versions) offers her recommendations on how to prepare food for sick people at numerous different places in the book, such as "Ein andere Suppen fuer die Krancken / Guesselin genannt" (128; Another soup for sick people, called Guesselin; in the 1620 edition this is printed on pp. 9–11). In a variant recipe, the author emphasizes: "Es sind offt Krancke / die sonst nirgend von leben / dann von der Brueh vnnd Suppen" (129; Often there are sick people who live on nothing but broths and soups; in the 1620 edition this is printed on pp. 11–12). In the 1597/1605 edition, Weckerin begins with an extensive discussion of almond milk, a ubiquitous foodstuff in all of medieval Europe.⁷⁵ The 1620 edition at first introduces a recipe for beef soup, followed by many other soup recipes, then by recipes for meat dishes, whereas the original cookbook subsequently offers recipes for rye and milk soups, and meals based on almonds, rice, cheese, and bread. These are also included in the 1620 edition, but they appear only much later (187ff.).

Nevertheless, despite the new arrangement and the changing emphasis from a cookbook specifically intended for sick people to a cookbook that addresses the general audience first, and sick people only second, the overall character and significance of Weckerin's contribution does not lose its relevance for us today. As her prologue and the language of the hundreds of recipes demonstrate, Weckerin was a remarkably skilled writer, who knew well how to present herself to her audience, how to secure the necessary authority from the learned medical doctors to publish her cookbook, and how to gain the support of an influential noble patron. The brief analysis of a small selection of her recipes has illustrated that Weckerin had a respectable command of the culinary discourse and knew well how to present herself to her public. Although her cookbook did not appear until the end of the sixteenth century, she has to be seen in the tradition of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century German cookbook authors. Apart from Sabina Welser and Anna Weckerin—at this point it seems appropriate to disregard Philippina Welser because she did not write the cookbook herself apart from a few additions—no other German premodern women authors seem to have contributed to this genre. Weckerin, however, profited from particular circumstances, being married to a well-known medical doctor and scholar, and her daughter from her second marriage marrying an even more famous medical doctor. Obviously, her gender made it difficult for her to come forward and to create her cookbook, thereby joining the learned community with a publication of her own. Nevertheless, she

⁷⁵ *Regional Cuisines of Medieval Europe. A Book of Essays*, ed. Melitta Weiss Adamson. Routledge Medieval Casebooks (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), xi, xvi–xviii, 36, et passim.

could rely on remarkable support from many medical doctors in Colmar, Basel, and Nuremberg, and was not only strongly encouraged by them to write this cookbook, but also found rapid success with her cookbook among a wider audience, as documented by the many new editions throughout the following century. In this sense it seems fully justified to conclude with the observation that Anna Weckerin continued the tradition of outstanding, eloquent, self-confident, and powerful women writers whom we encounter already in the tenth century with the abbess and dramatist Hrotsvita of Gandersheim. Certainly, both in genre and thematic interest, both in style and content of her text, Weckerin seems to share very little with the great medieval women mystics, with some of the outstanding courtly ladies glorified in twelfth- and thirteenth-century romances, or with women authors both in England and Hungary as diverse as Margery Kempe and Helene Kottanner. Nevertheless, the common factor for them all proves to be their ability and great desire to write, to express themselves in a variety of literary or non-literary forms, and thus to make their voices heard within a patriarchal world that apparently was not quite as patriarchal as we are wont to assume both for the Middle Ages and the early modern age.

X. Women and Cooking: A Literary Concoction

It might seem inappropriate at first sight to conclude this chapter with a brief reference to the remarkable modern writer Isabel Allende. With her extraordinary cookbook *Afrodita*, however, first published in Spanish in 1997, then translated into English in 1998, and subsequently into other languages as well, she demonstrated that the cookbook and the recipe by itself can assume a highly noteworthy literary character. Certainly, whereas Anna Weckerin primarily aimed at creating a cookbook with which she wanted to help sick people to receive better medical treatment than through often rather dubious medication, and whereas Allende wrote her cookbook with the intention of revealing the intimate connection between sensuality/eros and cooking, both women authors, separated by exactly four hundred years, have proved that literature and the art of narration (fictional or non-fictional) are powerful tools also for women writers.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Isabel Allende, *Afrodita. Cuentos, Recetas y Otros Afrodisíacos* (Barcelona: Enric Granados, 1997; 5th ed. 1998).

Conclusion¹

In Andreas Capellanus' *De amore* (ca. 1185–1190) we observe a curious phenomenon which has puzzled scholarship ever since the time when the earliest discussions of this significant treatise on courtly love and the complex gender relationships in the high Middle Ages began. The first two books present a number of highly respectful, most impressive, and thoroughly learned ladies who are highly educated in courtly *mores* and demonstrate outstanding rhetorical skills. There is no indication that the male narrator, or narrators, would harbor any particularly negative feelings toward them. On the contrary, as long as Walter, the person to whom Andreas addresses his treatise, looks out for women with an excellent character only, he will be in the best position to grow intellectually and emotionally. This advice also applies to women, in fact, to all lovers: "A person of good character draws the love of another person of the same kind, for a well-instructed lover, man or woman, does not reject an ugly lover if the character within is good."²

The rules of love, listed and expanded several times throughout the text, and issued by persons of high authority within the literary world, clearly paint a most positive picture of courtly ladies and of love outside of the bonds of marriage. The treatise does not criticize the male characters either, but that is beside the point and has no bearing on the central issue of what this book has tried to accomplish. Also, as we would have to accept, Andreas harbors no particular respect for prostitutes and peasant women, but these social class differences in the Middle Ages affected everyone and do not provide any specific information about the gender relationships within the aristocracy.³

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Barbara Stevenson, Kennesaw State University, Georgia, for her critical reading of this conclusion, for her constructive suggestions, and her encouragement in pursuing my research on this intriguing topic. Marilyn Sandidge, Westfield State College, MA, also read this conclusion and offered a number of last-minute corrections, for which I am very grateful.

² Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*. With Introduction, transl., and notes by John Jay Parry. Records of Civilization in Norton Paperback Editions (1941; New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1969), 35.

³ See the new study by Don A. Monson, *Andreas Capellanus, Scholasticism, and the Courtly Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005). Similarly, Catherine Brown, *Contrary Things: Exegesis, Dialectic, and the Poetics of Didacticism*. *Figurae* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), offers brilliant insights into the quintessential meaning of this complex treatise. The best investigation, however, proves to be by Kathleen Andersen-Wyman, *Andreas*

Then follows the third book, and suddenly everything is turned upside down. Now, the narrator unleashes a diatribe against women that reeks of the worst kind of misogyny, and vehemently argues against any form of love outside of marriage as a deadly sin, obviously in the best tradition of the patristic fathers and numerous successors throughout the early and high Middle Ages, whether we think of Tertullian, St. Jerome, Gratian, Marbod of Rennes, Walter Map, Jacques de Vitry, or Jean de Meun.⁴

Could it have been that Andreas only pretended to admire ladies over hundreds of pages, and that he finally revealed his true masculinist, patriarchal, and misogynist attitude at the end? Does this treatise represent the dominant twelfth-century male discourse regarding women, which in its hostile approach to the other gender and possibly in its radical rejection of the temptation of the flesh can actually be traced as far back as the late antiquity?⁵ If so, what are we then to make of the whole phenomenon of 'courtly love'? Can we assume that a religious and literal reading, at least of the third book, represents the only acceptable and possible hermeneutic approach to *De amore*?

This is, of course, not the case, especially since the numerous rhetorical strategies required a highly sophisticated reader who would not have fallen into the trap of the naive black-and-white rhetoric of traditional misogyny. These strategies include: inherent contradictions, dialectics, the playful operation with diegetics, metadiegetics, and intradiegetics, and the fanciful evocation of multiple voices throughout the text, then also the sophisticated use of irony and satire, finally the skillful employment of a large number of literary genres. All these elements clearly signal that a master writer is at work and draws from a rich tradition of courtly poetry, theological treatises, judicial works, and erotic allegory in order to establish a textual platform for discourse analysis, the examination of how communication functions, and to create a literary medium for the critical discussion of the basic moral and ethical values determining his society.⁶

Capellanus on Love?: Desire, Seduction and Subversion in a Twelfth-Century Latin Text. Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Culture (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming [2007?]). See also Albrecht Classen's chapter "Andreas Capellanus' *De amore* aus kommunikationstheoretischer Sicht," id., *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung: Die Suche nach der kommunikativen Gemeinschaft in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2002), 53–107.

⁴ For an excellent selection of relevant texts, see *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires, with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁵ *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires, with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁶ See, for instance, Peter Allen, *The Art of Love: Amatory Fiction from Ovid to the Romance of the Rose*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Catherine Brown, *Contrary Things: Exegesis, Dialectic, and the Poetics of Didacticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University

Unfortunately, however, both with respect to Andreas's treatise and to many other literary testimonies from the Middle Ages addressing courtly love, sexuality, and eroticism, it has always been easier to describe the past in a simple black and white dichotomy and to appropriate one side for acrimonious struggles fought today over the gender relationship, power structures, and ultimately over material resources.⁷ Differences are ignored, amorphous perspectives are whitewashed, and radical positions are perceived where there were none. Modern feminist struggles for gender equality—an ideal and value this entire book certainly supports in many open and subtle ways through its literary-historical perspective mostly focused on medieval German and European women's writing—sometimes tend to appropriate the past as a negative foil, whereas history has never been a linear, progressive development. By this token, it would be erroneous to project naively a bleak past for women on the basis of nineteenth- and twentieth-century conditions for women in Western Europe, when the situation in the Middle Ages that stretched over at least thousand years on a continent with enormous cultural, linguistic, and political differences was much too complex as to contrast it simply as a 'dark age' for women.⁸

Press, 1998); Albrecht Classen, *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung*, 53–107. See also Kathleen Andersen-Wyman, *Andreas Capellanus on Love?*, 2007 (?).

⁷ This is now illustrated by the certainly valuable contributions to *Maistresse of My Wit: Medieval Women, Modern Scholars*, ed. Louise D'Arcens and Juanita Feros Ruys. Making the Middle Ages, 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), who strive to embrace "interpretive practices driven by sympathy, empathy, and compassion—that is, by the convergence of emotion and informed imagination. . ." (6). There might be, however, a certain danger in that these scholars investigate the past for personal reasons and choose and select texts, questions, issues, and problems not because of their intrinsic relevance for the full understanding of the specific historical culture, but because of subjective, emotional interests derived from personal, idiosyncratic issues. It would certainly be justifiable to lay open the personal agendas in studying the past, but we must strive to be as objective in our investigations as possible if we do not want to forgo any claims on serious scholarship, subscribing to the two fundamental principles of verification and falsification. The two editors seem to assume that the opposite is, and ought to be, the case, insofar as they struggle against "the academic milieu [that] encourages us to pretend that we speak objectively solely from our studies and not from ourselves" (11). Of course, we choose our study objects for a number of (personal) reasons, but we also must subject them to all the rules of serious scholarship.

⁸ Both for theoretical and pragmatic approaches to the issue at stake, see Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts*. Women of Letters (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), who states unmistakably regarding letters written by women throughout the Middle Ages, 3: "they show women at the center of public life, and the women so involved, even when they are playing male roles, are aware of themselves as women. Women had a role in political, religious, and cultural developments from the earliest centuries of the Christian era, not continuously or ubiquitously but frequently and consistently enough to make it clear that medieval history in any form from the Middle Ages to the present which does not include the role of women is not true history." For a fascinating case study of a large number of female communities which certainly defy modern assumptions about women's absolute subjugation under men's rules, see Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the*

Louise O. Vasvári has recently argued that "traditional scholarship tended to overlook compulsive misogyny and sadistic sexuality inherent in a number of medieval texts."⁹ This one-sided view can be compensated by a process of 'depoeticizing' our sources and a sociolinguistic analysis which would deconstruct the implicit approval of wife-battering within a patriarchal world, as represented by medieval courtly and late medieval literature. Vasvári cites, among other examples, the ninth tale of the ninth day in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, where brutal wife-battering finds full approval, and where the female narrator, Emilia, herself affirms that women deserve beating if they do not perform obediently and submissively to their husbands. But the subsequent narrator's comment, reflecting upon the audience's reactions, indicates that the situation is not quite as clear-cut as one would assume. The tenth tale begins with the following response: "The tale told by the queen made the young men laugh and the ladies murmur a little; but when they were silent Dioneo began to speak thus."¹⁰ Of course we would expect and hope for a loud protest, but this does not occur. On the other hand, the following tale does not continue with this outrageous misogynist perspective, and instead paints the picture of an utterly foolish couple who let a priest have sexual intercourse with the wife in the presence of the husband because they hope to gain capital profit from his alleged magical arts.

Medieval Low Countries, 1200–1565. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) who confirmed that a significant percentage of beguines originated from the middle class, in fact, from the urban elite (93). See also Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, trans. Myra Heerspink-Scholz. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005). For a broad new assessment of the literary quality and textual character of letters in the German Middle Ages, see Christine Wand-Wittkowski, *Briefe im Mittelalter: Der deutschsprachige Brief als weltliche und religiöse Literatur* (Herne: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Kunst, 2000). She emphasizes, above all, the use of letters within a fictional context, but also examines religious/mystical letters. As to the large corpus of actual letters written by members of the St. Katharinenkloster (St. Catherine's convent) in Nuremberg during the fifteenth century, she notes: "Die überlieferten Originalbriefe sind Ausdruck einer gelebten Briefkultur, in der ein einzelner Brief in primärer und sekundärer Verwendung gleichermaßen von Bedeutung sein konnte." (325; The extant original letters are an expression of a lived epistolary culture in which each singular letter both in its primary and secondary function could be of equal significance.)

⁹ Louise O. Vasvári, "'Buon cavallo e mal cavallo vuole sprone, e buona femina e mala femina vuol bastone': Medieval Cultural Fictions of Wife Battering," *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 278 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 313–36; here 313. She also emphasizes, 314–15: "perhaps among forms of social violence it is only men beating their women in an intimate relationship which enjoys the dubious privilege of being considered as a source of humor, on the basis that women always deserve it and probably also derive sexual pleasure from it."

¹⁰ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. Richard Aldington (1930; New York: Dell Publishing, 1970), 558.

Glancing at many other tales in the *Decameron*, it would be impossible to confirm or to reject Vasvári's claim insofar as Boccaccio offers countless perspectives toward the gender relationship and introduces both foolish and intelligent, both powerful and weak men and women, and he has some narrators approve of violent treatment of women, whereas others specifically address their opposition to physical force applied by a husband or a wife to his or her partner. As Rüdiger Schnell now suggests, sexuality gave women tremendous influence over their husbands and many times allowed them to influence public politics, the ruler's behavior toward his subjects, and his personal value system. He goes so far as to argue that for numerous medieval writers and preachers women's sexuality could be instrumentalized for their husbands' education and character formation.¹¹ After all, gender relations are predicated on negotiations, discourse, debate, and communication. In some cases these negotiations achieve the desired results for both partners; in other cases they fail. Sometimes the result is violence, and this violence was often directed at the woman, sometimes, however, also at the man. For instance, in Giovanni Sercambi's tale "De Magna Gelosia," contained in his *Novelle* (ca. 1420),¹² the jealous husband Marco da Castello applies a chastity belt to his first wife's body, from which she dies after several years. When he tries to do the same with his second wife, she resorts to an effective defense plan and kills him. Neither her parents nor the authorities seem to find any faults for her action. As I hope to have demonstrated in several chapters, the same complex situation emerges in a number of late medieval German narratives.

Even within the same group of tales of the ninth day in Boccaccio's *Decameron* we discover a radical reversal of gender roles, such as in the fifth tale where Monna Tessa brutally punishes her husband for his attempt to commit adultery: "At the sight of his wife, Calandrino felt neither alive nor dead, and dared not make any defence. But when he had been scratched and buffeted and his hair pulled out, he found his hat and stood up, humbly begging his wife not to scream so loud if she did not want him to be cut to pieces" (544–43).

So, within the *Decameron* individual women know how to take action into their hands and how to fight for their marriage, social standing, and individual rights. And within the narrative process of tale telling, as Marilyn Migiel underscores, there is always room, by necessity, to explore different readings and hence

¹¹ Rüdiger Schnell, "Macht im Dunkeln: Welchen Einfluß hatten Ehefrauen auf ihre Männer? Geschlechterkonstrukte in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit," *Zivilisationsprozesse: Zu Erziehungsschriften in der Vormoderne*, ed. id. (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2004), 309–29; here 314.

¹² Janet Levarie Smarr, "Sercambi, Giovanni," *Medieval Italy: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Christopher Kleinhenz. 2 vols. (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 1021–22; the tale is no. CXXX in Giovanni Sercambi, *Novelle*, nuovo testo critico con studio introduttivo e note a cura di Giovanni Sinicropi. 2 vols. *Filologia: Testi e Studi*, 5 (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1995), 1035–39.

interpretations. Expanding on her argument, Migiel emphasizes, referring to the female narrator Emilia who seemingly approves of violence against unruly women, "she allows that the proverb might have a contested interpretation, and she argues for her interpretation as an interpretation."¹³

Vasvári hopes that her analysis "will help support women's liberation from the cultural fictions of the female gender and deconstruct the valorization of male gender. The goal is to make women subjects rather than objects of cultural production."¹⁴ Judith M. Bennett recently added the pedagogical insight: "But a light touch helps considerably, as does a steady focus on many ways in which women maneuvered within patriarchy, benefitted from patriarchy, and critiqued patriarchy."¹⁵ All this certainly proves to be noble goals, goals which the present collection of studies also pursues, though from several different perspectives and with a predominant focus on women protagonists and women writers in the German Middle Ages. First, when we encounter such a heteroglossic cacophony such as in the *Decameron*, in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, in Heinrich Kaufringer's *mæren*, or any of the many late medieval tale collections, we always need to keep the discursive element in mind that characterizes these text corpora.¹⁶ Then, those narratives that focus on women's abuse at the hands of their husbands or male relatives are often balanced by narratives that reflect the opposite situation, especially when the female protagonist is able to manipulate the man and punishes him for his misbehavior or has him beaten up by other men.

More important, though, violence against women is not a matter of simple entertainment for a male audience, although some narratives, such as those contained in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, at first sight seem to confirm such a conclusion. As I have suggested in chapter six, "Domestic Violence in Medieval and Early Modern German Literature," women's private treatment at the hand of their husbands was the object of careful documentation and evaluation by many

¹³ Marilyn Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 158.

¹⁴ Vasvári, "'Buon cavallo'," 336.

¹⁵ Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 152.

¹⁶ This dialectical, often contradictory, especially open-ended approach to fundamental human concerns might well be a hallmark of fifteenth-century literature, see, for instance, Sabine Obermaier, *Das Fabelbuch als Rahmenerzählung: Intertextualität und Intratextualität als Wege zur Interpretation des Buchs der Beispiele der alten Weisen Antons von Pforr*. Beihefte zum Euphorion, 48 (Heidelberg: Winter, 2004), 267–305; she alerts us, however, to the fact that similar strategies can already be found in the Old-Indian source text, the *Panchatantra*. As to the discursive character of most medieval literature, see *Speaking in the Medieval World*, ed. Jean E. Godsall-Myers. Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions. Medieval and Early Modern Peoples, 16 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003); and *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 278 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004).

medieval writers, male and female, and in all the examples cited here the male protagonists and/or the bystanders, especially the authorities, take a negative stand against women's abuse.¹⁷ This is not to belittle or even to deny the difficult times medieval women faced, especially when they were married to abusive husbands, but each case reported in chronicles, literary narratives, and in other sources requires a careful analysis, taking into account the context, the narrator's strategies, the mental-historical framework, and the social and legal background relevant for each incidence. As Susan Lanser underscores, embracing Bakhtinian heteroglossic theory, "in narrative there is no single voice."¹⁸

In fact, misogyny was not a typical, or dominant, feature of the Middle Ages, especially since it is, alas, still around today and might never fully disappear because of the basic gender conflict. The issue is not misogyny or violence against women as such, but the response to both aspects, both by the medieval writers, for instance, and ourselves as interpreters of their texts. Public criticism and legal actions against specific behavior, gender roles, and public roles tend to be mostly informed by fear of and opposition to the current situation. Hence, the more we hear of medieval gynophobia and related forms of hatred of women, the more could we assume that the opposite might have been the case, depending on the circumstances. As Roberta L. Krueger emphasizes with regard to Old French romances, "The dynamic of noblewomen's relationship to romance is double-edged, involving complicity with certain values and questioning others. As the first genre in which women are portrayed both as privileged recipients and as objects of chivalric exchange and idealized desire, verse romance inaugurated a critical space in which gender identities could have been questioned even as they were formulated."¹⁹

I hope to have shown that the numerous examples of domestic violence dealt with in medieval literature do not indicate its condonation or acceptance at all by those who reported about it or reflected upon the devastating ramifications; rape

¹⁷ A rather crude feminist perspective undergirds the thesis developed by Robert Scheuble, *mannes manheit, vrouwen meister: Männliche Sozialisation und Formen der Gewalt gegen Frauen im Nibelungenlied und in Wolframs von Eschenbach Parzival*. Beiträge zur Mittelalterforschung, 6 (Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2005). Although many acts of violence are committed in both works, Scheuble believes that this violence is never fully criticized and rather condoned in the name of patriarchal society as part of the male quest for self-identification.

¹⁸ Susan S. Lanser, "Toward a Feminist Narratology," *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robin R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (1986; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 610–29; here 617.

¹⁹ Roberta L. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance*. Cambridge Studies in French, 43 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 252. She also suggests that "the problematic role of women and tangled web of sexual and political conflicts in many of these romances may also challenge the reader to confront issues of gender identity that are still pertinent today" (252).

was rape, both then and today, and women had many means available to defend themselves, not the least of which was the assistance that they could expect from the male members of their society.²⁰ Despite many attempts to compare our modern world with the Middle Ages in terms of violence, mostly with the hidden agenda in mind to demonstrate how much better we are off today,²¹ courtly literature proves to be a battle ground for the evaluation of and approaches to violence. In fact, the examples in German medieval literature, discussed both in chapter six, "Domestic Violence in Medieval and Early Modern German Literature," and also in chapter two, "Women Speak up at the Medieval Court," confirm that violence was identified as a dangerous evil within courtly society; that both the public and the contemporary writers and poets realized that women were excessively victimized; and that the well-being of the entire community depended on the containment and suppression of violence at large, and of violence directed at women in particular. In this sense we have to realize that some of the courtly romances that I have discussed reflect a concrete program specifically targeting injustice and crimes committed against women. The female protagonists do not simply turn into representational icons, and instead maintain their individuality, influence, and public roles—if not as equals, then at least as highly esteemed partners in the difficult struggle to achieve the ideals of courtly society in ethical, moral, even physical, religious, and material terms. This has been recently confirmed even from a legal-historical perspective considering the canonical discussion of wife's rights and husbands' obligations within marriage.²²

In this sense the first two chapters, "Violence to Women, Women's Rights, and Their Defenders in Medieval German Literature," and "Women Speak up at the Medieval Court," set the tone for the entire volume insofar as I present numerous examples from the early to the late Middle Ages where female characters stand up against violence committed against them, speak up and defend themselves, and

²⁰ In some of the chapters I have already cited the relevant research literature, but James Brundage still needs to be mentioned here, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 3, 14, 47–48, et passim, traces the public discourse of rape throughout the history of the medieval Church.

²¹ Donald J. Kagay, L. J. Andrew Villalon, *The Final Argument: the Imprint of Violence on Society in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1998); Henrietta Moore, "The Problem of Explaining Violence in the Social Sciences," *Sex and Violence: Issues in Representation and Experience*, ed. Penelope Harvey and Peter Gold (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 138–55; *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Routledge Medieval Casebooks (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

²² Charles J. Reid, Jr., *Power over the Body, Equality in the Family: Rights and Domestic Relations in Medieval Canon Law* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004). For an excellent review, see Evyatar Marienberg in: *The Medieval Review* (online at: <http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=tmr;cc=tmr;q1=Marienberg;rgn=main;view=text;idno=baj9928.0609.020>; last accessed on Feb. 23, 2007).

fight for their beloved, even if this could mean their own death. Whereas the first chapter highlights how much women characters had to endure, which earned them much pity on the part of their literary creators, the second chapter goes one step further and illuminates the degree to which Hartmann von Aue and Gottfried von Straßburg—here representing many other contemporary courtly poets—projected their female protagonists as the true heroines without whom the male characters would not be able to achieve any of their goals.

The discovery of women as major power players since the twelfth century, which also led to the emergence of courtly literature *per se*,²³ finds its superb expression in Hartmann's *Erec* and Gottfried's *Tristan*, and to some extent also in their French sources. Whereas in chapters one and five I examine the impact of violence on women and how they responded or were defended by the male authorities, these two literary examples demonstrate that women portrayed by men could, just as in the case of the first two books in Andreas Capellanus's *De amore*, rise to the highest position within the courtly cosmos and almost assume a divine, although at times also tragic, yet certainly fulfilling role.

Emilia's comments about women in the ninth tale of the ninth day in Boccaccio's *Decameron* requires considerable sensitivity to the duplicitous nature of her own words and the implied irony by the narrator: "All of which things show that we need the control of others. It stands to reason that everyone who needs help and control should be subject, obedient and reverent to his ruler. And what rulers and helpers have we, except men?" (554). Similarly, Enite and Isolde are suffering badly, and both are abused by men and patriarchal society, which has had, as Judith M. Bennett now argues, its own history, "one that is inherent to the feminist project of women's history."²⁴ But both Hartmann and Gottfried paint deeply sympathetic pictures of their heroines and indirectly voice harsh criticism of the abusive practices by their male protagonists.²⁵

²³ C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 82–106.

²⁴ Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters*, 54.

²⁵ Kurt Flasch, *Vernunft und Vergnügen. Liebesgeschichten aus dem Decameron* (Munich: Beck, 2002), argues along the same lines in his interpretation of Griselda's destiny: "Griselda hat alles gewonnen, weil sie sich von allem trennen konnte" (266; Griselda has won everything because she could part from everything), and: "Die Griselda-Erzählung vollendet die Zuwendung Boccaccios zu leidenden Frauen, indem sie im Anschluß an Cicero und Seneca eine ethische Reflexion über konsequente Liebe veranschaulicht. . . Griselda veranschaulicht das Motto Boccaccios: 'Es lebe die Liebe! Nieder mit dem Geld'. Und zuletzt: Es gibt keinen mittelalterlichen Gottesbegriff, auch nicht bei Wilhelm von Ockham, der es gestattet hätte, den rohen und lügnerischen Gualtieri als Repräsentanten Gottes zu denken" (267; The Griselda tale completes Boccaccio's dedication to suffering women by illustrating, following Cicero and Seneca, an ethical reflection on consequential love. . . . Griselda illustrates Boccaccio's motto: 'Long live love! Down with money' . . . And finally: There is no medieval concept of God, not even in William of Ockham's writing, which would have permitted imagining the brutal and lying Gualtieri as a representative of God).

The third and fourth chapters—"Women's Secular and Spiritual Power in the Middle Ages: Two Case Studies: Hildegard von Bingen and Marie de France," and "Gender Crossing, Spiritual Transgression, and the Epistemological Experience of the Divine in Mystical Discourse: Hildegard von Bingen"—logically turn to two of the best known medieval women writers, the first a German Benedictine nun who only expressed herself in Latin, the second an Anglo-Norman poet. Both women powerfully reflect how much public esteem medieval female writers could achieve within the right circumstances. The comparison of these two women—a comparison which has, to my knowledge, never been undertaken before—serves to illustrate that medieval society was not at all as misogynist as Andreas Capellanus's third book in his *De amore*, and, by the same token, many modern feminists have implied.²⁶ Women such as Hildegard and Marie spoke up, found an audience, and could exert considerable influence, as many other mystical writers, such as Mechthild von Magdeburg, St. Catherine of Siena, and Brigit of Sweden, also demonstrated through their treatises, letters, and other types of textual genres.²⁷ In fact, the somewhat unusual, but certainly insightful comparison reveals the extent to which writing empowered women and allowed them to transgress traditional patriarchal barriers. Both Hildegard's and Marie's female characters struggle to overcome male opposition and to achieve personal happiness, the first through spiritual union with the Godhead, the other through fighting against society's control preventing lovers to marry each other. But happiness was possible, and so individual self-fulfillment, as Hildegard's mystical discourse and Marie's *Lais* indicate.²⁸ Hildegard also demonstrated, as I indicate in the fourth chapter, how much a woman writer could gain public influence, religious authority, and inner strength through the interaction with the total 'Other,' the Godhead. If there had ever been any doubt about women's standing within medieval society, Hildegard would either be the absolute exception, or the proverbial tip of the iceberg. It seems highly unlikely, especially in light of the observations in the other chapters, that the first option was the case. After all, there were countless women convents all over Europe, and many of them were led by powerful, energetic, intellectual, and resourceful abbesses, not to mention the

²⁶ See, for example, Jerold C. Frakes, *Brides and Doom: Gender, Property, and Power in Medieval German Women's Epic*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); Elisabeth Lienert, "Zur Diskursivität der Gewalt in Wolframs 'Parzival,'" *Wolfram-Studien* XVII (2002): 223–45; see now also Robert Scheuble, *mannes manheit, vrouwen meister*, 2005. For more theoretical studies, mostly focusing on Latin and English texts, see *Violence against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. Anna Roberts (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1998).

²⁷ Sarah S. Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); see also Peter Dinzelsbacher, *Mittelalterliche Frauenmystik* (Paderborn, Munich, et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1992).

²⁸ Albrecht Classen, "Happiness in the Middle Ages? Hartmann von Aue and Marie de France," *Neohelicon* XXV, 2 (1998): 247–74.

large number of nuns working as artists, teachers, musicians, calligraphers, sculptors, writers, composers, doctors, herbalists, and scientists. Among these many influential and respected women, Hildegard stands out, after all, because she was graced with visions of the Godhead and was given the opportunity to come to terms with the absolute 'Other,' a quest most philosophers, poets, musicians, artists, among others, are still struggling with today. In her analysis of Middle English devotional texts, Anne Clark Bartlett reaches surprisingly similar conclusions: "Considering individual Middle English devotional texts in this way, as sites of competing genres, registers, and traditions, opens up a discursive space to examine feminine resistance to medieval misogyny, both in theory and practice. . . . This heteroglossic approach to Middle English devotional literature moves us beyond the notion of a univocal and hegemonic clerical antifeminism and toward an analysis of the plurality of voices and functions within these texts, the play of gendered languages, which occurs in the larger social context that both authorized and was shaped by them."²⁹

The extent to which female communities provided a constructive framework for their members who were thus enabled to seek out a mystical community with the Godhead, which in turn empowered them to gain access to the written word, is illustrated by the fourteenth-century Southwest German Dominican *Sisterbooks* in intriguing and so far not well-understood terms. Though little discussed even by feminist medievalists,³⁰ these *Sisterbooks* force us to question the meaning of the term 'literary' and to consider alternative perspectives based on narration as a form of self-expression and self-realization, as I have outlined in the seventh chapter, "Reading, Listening, and Writing Communities in Late Medieval Women's Dominican Convents. The Mystical Drive Toward the Word." These large corpora of mystical visionary accounts not only reflect the considerable support women enjoyed in convents, but also underscore the fact how much medieval convents were actually important centers of art and literature produced by and for women.³¹

²⁹ Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 145–46.

³⁰ For a remarkable exception, see the excellent studies by Rebecca L. R. Garber, *Feminine Figurae. Representations of Gender in Religious Texts by Medieval German Women Writers, 1100–1375*. Studies in Medieval History and Culture, 10 (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), and: Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing About Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004); cf. also Gertrud Jaron Lewis, *By Women, for Women, about Women. The Sister-Books of Fourteenth-Century Germany*. Studies and Texts, 125 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996).

³¹ Jürgen Wolf, "vrouwen phlegene ze lesene: Beobachtungen zur Typik von Büchern und Texten für Frauen," *Text und Text in lateinischer und volkssprachiger Überlieferung des Mittelalters. Freiburger Kolloquium 2004*. Together with Wolfgang Haubrichs and Klaus Ridder, ed. Eckart Conrad Lutz. Wolfram-Studien XIX (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2006): 169–90, confirms this perspective through a

Even though their revelations did not lend themselves well to exciting reading in terms of chivalry and knighthood, they involve many powerful experiences and highly respectable efforts to come to terms with them through the written report, a problem often solved through the reliance on the apophatic discourse—a discourse coming to terms with the ineffable.³² This discourse, however, was necessary because they would not have been capable of communicating their visions to their convent sisters in any other meaningful way.

Ultimately, as in most other cases of literary productivity, a personal experience, ineffable by itself, inspires the individual to resort to the pen and to circumscribe what s/he saw, heard, felt, or witnessed in any other way. But the compilation of these *Sisterbooks* was the result mostly of a group effort to overcome the limitations of the oral report and to secure the individual visions for posterity, which indicates, once again, the considerable self-sustaining power and influence which medieval women convents could gain.³³

How much can we be certain that those texts that were allegedly composed by women writers were actually produced by them? The recent debate about the authenticity of Heloise's letters to Abelard—both those traditionally attributed to her and those that Constant Mews now suggests she might also have exchanged with her husband—illustrates the complex problems of this question.³⁴ In chapter five, "The Winsbeckin—Female Discourse or Male Projection? New Questions to a Middle High German Gendered Didactic Text in Comparison with Christine de Pizan," I raise the specter that possibly the didactic dialogue poem *Die Winsbeckin*, involving a mother and her daughter discussing the meaning and relevance of love and marriage, might not have been created by a male author as a satire of the female sex. Instead, as I suggest, it might have been the literary product by an otherwise unknown female writer, as the title name implies in the first place and as later illustrators of the famous *Manesse Codex* (*Große Heidelberger Liederhandschrift*) indicate as well. Admittedly, the historical-literary circumstances do not provide much concrete evidence except for what the text tells us, where a

study of twelfth- and thirteenth-century psalters written by and for women.

³² Bruce Miley, *The Unspoken Word. Negative Theology in Meister Eckhart's German Sermons* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002).

³³ Margarete Hubrath, *Schreiben und Erinnern: Zur "memoria" im Liber Specialis Gratiae Mechthilds von Hakeborn* (Paderborn, Munich, et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1996), 36–48; for a study of English women convents, see Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England: Female Monasteries in the Diocese of Norwich, 1350–1540*. *Studies in the History of Medieval Religion*, 12 (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: Boydell, 1998).

³⁴ Constant J. Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard: Perceptions of Dialogue in Twelfth-Century France*. With a translation by Neville Chiavaroli and Constant J. Mews. *The New Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); *Listening to Heloise. The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler. *The New Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

female voice claims authority. But the counter-argument, traditionally upheld, cannot produce fully convincing arguments either.

In this chapter I mostly examine how traditional scholarship has reached its conclusion, rightly or wrongly, particularly with regard to such texts that could have been composed by a woman, but which reads very much like a poem that seems to appeal to a female audience above all. To gain new perspectives, here I offer a comparison with the didactic teachings by Christine de Pizan in her *Treasure of the City of Ladies* (1405), an approach which has never been tried out before, either by French nor by German scholars alike. Surprisingly, the general range of values and ideals presented by Christine, whose authorship is clearly beyond all doubts, resembles very much those formulated by the mother in the dialogue poem attributed to the Winsbeckin.

Whereas Ann Marie Rasmussen had squarely placed the Middle High German text into the tradition of misogynist writing using a female voice in the context of a mother-daughter dialogue,³⁵ the comparison with Christine's recommendations and teachings indicate that this conclusion might not be fully valid. In fact, the traditional arguments against the Winsbeckin as a true female author prove to be speculative and unconvincing because this poem was certainly written for a female audience, providing them with instruction relevant to their personal lives, and so ultimately might actually have been composed by a woman. Although we cannot be certain, neither can the other side, simply claiming this text for a male author just because the mother's defense of the value of love and marriage to her daughter parallels that of the father's to his son in the Winsbecke poem (*Der Winsbecke*). In fact, here we get into the midst of a significant modern discourse about the canon, the role of women's literature, and the opportunities and difficulties today to recover some of the female voices from the past.³⁶

The complexity of questions then leads to the last three chapters, the first dealing with the vexing concern of how to define the literary quality or character of a mystical discourse. In "Margery Kempe as a Writer: A Woman's Voice in the Mystical and Literary Discourse," I turn to one of the most famous Middle English women writers and reexamine her *Book* in light of the old discussion of what constitutes literature and what not. One of the key criteria seems to be how many

³⁵ Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters in Medieval German Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 136–59.

³⁶ These difficulties are well illustrated in the effort to identify the full list of texts composed by Marie de France, see June Hall McCash, "La vie seinte Audree. A Fourth Text by Marie de France?," *Speculum* 77, 3 (2002): 744–77; for late medieval German women's poetry, see Albrecht Classen, *Late medieval German Women's Poetry: Secular and Religious Songs*. Library of Medieval Women (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2004). See also *Medieval Woman's Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches*, ed. Anne L. Klinck and Ann Marie Rasmussen. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

narrative registers and literary genres the text might contain, if there are more than one. Moreover, does the *Book* reflect a straightforward, almost chronicle-like discourse, or does Kempe achieve a higher goal in her account that would justify our identifying her work as a noteworthy contribution to late medieval women's literature? In this chapter I address these issues from various perspectives and answer the central question in the affirmative. This has numerous implications for our future study of mystical literature at large and of women's writings in particular.

As I discussed in the introduction to this volume, the traditional divide between fictionality and factual reporting does not make much sense for medieval literature, whereas the narrative perspectives play a key role. Hayden White's observations concerning this issue make the most sense here and deserve to be quoted at length:

Narrative discourse, then, is as much "performative" as it is "constative," to use the terminology of early Austin, which Ricoeur favors at crucial junctures in his discussions of metaphoric language and symbolic discourse. And historical narrative, which takes the events created by human actions as its immediate subject, does much more than merely describe those events; it also imitates them, that is, performs the same kind of creative act as those performed by historical agents . . . This experience of historicity, finally, can be represented symbolically in narrative discourse, because such discourse is a product of the same kind of hypotactical figuration of events (as beginnings, middles, and ends) as that met with in the actions of historical agents who hypotactically figure their lives as meaningful stories.³⁷

He concludes that historical and literary accounts do not differ in essential terms and instead aim for a common goal:

Historical stories and fictional stories resemble one another because whatever the differences between their immediate contents (real events and imaginary events, respectively), their ultimate content is the same: the structure of human time. Their shared form, narrative, is a function of this shared content. . . Thus, any narrative representation of human events is an enterprise of profound philosophical — one could even say anthropological — seriousness. It does not matter whether the events that serve as the immediate referents of a narrative are considered to be real or only imaginary; what matters is whether these events are considered to be typically human.³⁸

Indeed, if we apply these conclusions to the widely roaming narrative voices in Margery's *Book*, all of them held together by her own self as a mystically inspired woman on a quest to find the Godhead, there is no doubt that Margery produced

³⁷ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 178–79.

³⁸ White, *The Content of the Form*, 180.

a fascinating literary account in which she could mirror herself, above all, then also her community, and late medieval society at large, using the official Church as her negative foil to her own divine predestination as a mystical visionary.

Similarly, Helene Kottanner, the Hungarian-German chambermaid, succeeded in making her own voice heard in her memoirs about the daring theft of the imperial crown in order to secure her lady, Queen Elizabeth, the control over the country. Helene seemed to relate the events in a factual manner, and seemed to distance herself from the narrative account as an objective observer. On the contrary, as I argue in the ninth chapter ("Helene Kottanner: A Fifteenth-Century Author. The Earliest Medieval Memoirs by a German Woman Writer"), drawing from many different literary registers, Helene created a heteroglossic amalgam where she assumed center position and created an extraordinary literary platform to project herself to her posterity. Although she relied on the narrative framework of the chronicle, or, more properly speaking, the memoirs, the close reading of her account demonstrates that Helene commanded considerable skills as a writer and utilized these to their full effect in the historical-literary reflections on her personal experiences and accomplishments. The range of genres utilized for this account is considerable, extending from objectifying descriptions to dialogues, from introspective reflections to plain discussions of the major events.

Even though Helene enjoyed no political influence at all, she quickly realized that her personal relationship with the queen jolted her into the center of actions for a short time period during which she enjoyed the full attention of the major power players in Hungary. Ultimately, the author accomplished her goal, just as Margery Kempe did, to create a *bricolage* of varying voices that all focus on Helene (both subject and object of her account) and allow her to present herself within this narrative as the center of the universe in Hungarian and Hapsburgian politics during that short period when Helene stole the Hungarian crown for her lady and assisted her in delivering and baptizing her young son. These observations do not transform her *Memoirs* into a major piece of fifteenth-century German literature, but Helene's literary efforts certainly contributed to the development of a female discourse during that time, which illustrates the extent to which women were both capable of and willing to come forth, to assume a place in public life, and to represent themselves within the narrative context of their own works.

The most unusual case of a female writer discussed in this volume proves to be Anna Weckerin, the author of a cookbook with medicinal purposes, first published in 1597. She seems to have been highly popular with her work, considering the numerous reprints, though only few copies have survived until today. As a cookbook, Anna's work truly falls far outside of the realm of literature in its traditional definition. But as the work of a woman writer, it certainly deserves to be included here because the author was fully cognizant of the public authority and reputation that she gained through the publication of her book. Both her

lengthy introduction and the actual recipes demonstrate that Anna Weckerin had a solid command of the rhetorical skills necessary for the creation of such an instructional text. The close analysis of individual passages also demonstrates that the author was an impressive writer who knew how to convey the relevant information and to convince her readers to follow her dietary recommendations that were obviously based on personal experiences. These she had acquired through her close collaboration with her husband, a medical doctor, thereby transgressing traditional barriers keeping women out of the sphere of sciences.

Cookery had become an art and science already by the fifteenth century also in Germany, but most other cookbooks that have survived from that time had been written by male authors. The only other woman who also composed a significant cookbook, Sabina Welser, also deserves our attention, but in comparison with Weckerin's work it offers only the bare-bones information (ingredients) for the individual recipes. By contrast, Anna grasped the opportunity to reflect upon herself, her observations, and her experiences in creating recipes for the sick. For her, good recipes would work wonders and could easily supplant medicine. For us, on the other hand, her cookbook provides additional evidence that many women certainly knew how to establish access to the narrative, at times even the literary, discourse.

Weckerin's cookbook cannot be counted among early modern German literature in the narrow sense of the word, but it certainly confirms our findings in the previous chapters; that is, that numerous women wrote, studied, and made their voices heard, and enjoyed considerable respect for their work. Beyond this cookbook, Weckerin also composed a wedding song, which scholarship has likewise ignored entirely. In other words, the archives promise to yield many more texts written by medieval and early modern women, even though the term 'literature' might not necessarily be the most appropriate for them all.

This is not to assume that premodern women did not face many barriers and much prejudice by their male contemporaries. Often excluded from the book market and disrespected as authors of romances and courtly love poetry—with Marie de France, Christine de Pizan, and Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken being significant exceptions—women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance resorted to many different genres and demonstrated both their strong will and ability to come to terms with their own lives through the narrative discourse, whether as mystical reflections or in the form of scientific texts. Insofar as the women authors discussed here indicate the wide range of opportunities available to them even at such early times, it comes as no surprise that male authors paid considerable respect to their female contemporaries and projected fascinating portraits of strong, independent-minded female protagonists. Violence, of course, was a fact of life that many women had to endure, but they were, perhaps not so

surprisingly, supported and defended by their lovers, husbands, and family members, who were also subject to personal suffering.

The ten chapters in this volume have, as I hope to have demonstrated, opened a plethora of new channels for the study of women writers, both in medieval and early modern Europe at large, and in German-speaking lands in particular, to express themselves, to fight for their individuality, to fend off violence, and to find avenues to become creative and to write about their own lives. The premodern times were not entirely dominated by men; instead the latter had to deal with the other half of the population, women, and obviously granted them, grudgingly or not, considerable free space and liberty to write. Our search for these hitherto forgotten voices has yielded a number of promising leads, especially because we have moved away from the traditional canon and integrated many different voices who were bold and strong enough to step forward and to share their experiences, knowledge, and understanding with their male contemporaries. These global ruminations might also strengthen our case that the Winsbeckin might have been an independent writer, or at least that the dialogue between mother and daughter specifically served a female audience, closely taking into account female concerns and interests.

Much research by previous scholars has helped me to reach the conclusions upon which this book is built. But we need to go beyond the narrow interest in the mystical discourse, and should not be content with studying the same well-known women writers such as Hildegard von Bingen, Marie de France, Christine de Pizan, and Margery Kempe, though I have been guilty of this as well because they are, so to speak, literary giants.³⁹ In several chapters I have also turned my attention to them, but then either from a comparative perspective, or with the intent of applying new analytic criteria for the close examination of the actual literary quality of a text. We also need to be more careful in assigning texts that are identified by a female name to a male author only because we know nothing about the biographical background. The argument *e nihilo* does not convince, and if a woman writer (Winsbeckin?) discusses gender roles and women's personal experiences in rather traditional terms, then this does not necessarily make her to a mouthpiece of male-dominated society (for a contrastive example, see the case of Christine de Pizan).

Women also wanted to enjoy happiness and love, and hoped to avoid suffering from violence, and they found, indeed, help and support at the hand of individual male writers who scathingly condemned abusive treatment of women (e.g., Wolfram von Eschenbach). This is not to ignore the heavy role played by patriarchal society and numerous vitriolic attacks on women by clerics, medical

³⁹ See, for instance, Claudia Spanily, *Autorschaft und Geschlechterrolle: Möglichkeiten weiblichen Literarientums im Mittelalter*. Tradition – Reform – Innovation, 5 (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2002).

writers, and secular writers,⁴⁰ but in light of recent Gender Studies at large and in light of the findings reported in this book, we can now rest assured that many medieval and early modern women knew how to make their voices heard; the literary and other discourses were open to them as well, even if only in a limited or subdued fashion. Kimberly LoPrete points out, for instance, that the term “virago,” though not used very often in the Middle Ages, indicates that a considerable number of married women and widows were fully respected as leaders of their households and of the men serving under their rule. However, she also qualifies her own observation: “But the gender cards were stacked against lordly women as they were against all women. Whereas all aristocratic men might reasonably expect to command others in some authorized capacity during their lifetimes, many aristocratic women would not, and those who did would have more limited opportunities to wield lordly powers than did their male peers. Moreover, such female lords would be expected to behave like all other lay women, even as they commanded men in ‘male’ domains—a tricky tightrope to walk at the best of times.”⁴¹ Still, *viragos* existed, and they were recognized, found sympathies, and were met with respect, admiration, and also fear, whether we think of Enite, Isolde, Herzeloyde, or many unnamed women in late medieval *mæren* (verse narratives). In other words, from our perspective, the medieval gender discourse and gender relationships were complex, more so than many modern readers might have thought possible.

While many feminist scholars have already confirmed some of our observations with respect to the situation in medieval France and England, the present study adds a new perspective on the history of German women writers in comparison with their European contemporaries. It also responds to the appeal by Judith M. Benett in her recently published, cogently argued monograph, *History Matters*, not to forget the premodern past of modern-day feminist thinkers and to embrace the Middle Ages and the early modern period as fertile staging grounds for the struggle of the two genders. For her the task at hand is “a return to the feminist heartland of critiquing and opposing the oppression of women” as it was practiced in medieval times and beyond.⁴² My task consisted of identifying the gender discourse in the early history of German and European literature, as encapsulated both in texts written by female writers and also in texts composed by male writers.

⁴⁰ Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*. Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), pursues this line of argument almost exclusively, and ignores the considerable corpus of alternative voices that I have dealt with here.

⁴¹ Kimberly A. LoPrete, “Gendering Viragos: Medieval Perceptions of Powerful Women,” *Victims or Viragos?*, ed. Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless. Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women 4 (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 17–38; here 37.

⁴² Judith M. Benett, *History Matters*, 28.

But I would not want to conclude here without referring to a most significant observation succinctly formulated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, responding to her own question why she had focused on women mostly, as if men did not matter in postmodern studies on premodern societies. Far from it, she says, "[b]ecause women are not a special case, but can represent the human, with the asymmetries attendant upon any such representation. As simple as that."⁴³ After all, our efforts in literary studies are focused on fundamental humanistic issues, and hopefully all our humanistic efforts will eventually lead to an improvement of our lot. This might be overly optimistic, but it is the best option we have here in life.

⁴³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*. Wellek Library Lectures in Critical Theory (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 70.

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